

CONCERNING
PAUL AND FIAMMETTA

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BY

L. ALLEN HARKER

AUTHOR OF "A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY"

With an Introduction

BY

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To
MORRIS AND LINDSAY PULLAR

At bedtime when the lights were low
To your bedside I used to go
And tell this tale at night.
There in your little beds you lay —
The sea was green, the sky was gray,
And both your quilts were white.

FOREWORD

A YEAR ago, while staying in England, I chanced upon a modest book called "A Romance of the Nursery." (I sometimes think the word "chance" might be eliminated from such matters; that the books rightfully belonging to one gravitate to one, by dint of some unconsidered but irresistible force!)

The author was unknown, but the story charmed me from the first chapter to the last. The atmosphere was so genuine, the characters so well individualised, and the little heroine Fiammetta so freshly and engagingly drawn, that I was eager to see more work from the same hand. Finding that the circle of Mrs. Harker's readers

had a smaller circumference than was consistent with her talents (a comic sort of tragedy that is continually happening in the literary world), I wrote to her, begging that I might have the pleasure of introducing her next book to an American audience, — or at least to that generous and loyal contingent whom I know and feel to be my friends, the captives of my own particular “bow and spear.”

The book, as it happened, was already written, and I was glad to see by the title, “Concerning Paul and Fiammetta,” that the same group of children, so beguiling in “*A Romance of the Nursery*,” figured in its pages ; children who sometimes lapsed from the highest virtue, but never from good breeding.

The story has many appealing qualities, — its gayety, sympathy, humour, and lifelikeness ; and perhaps to American

readers one of its chiefest charms will be that it is so thoroughly English, — as English as a hedgerose or a bit of pink hawthorne, — yet, with all its local colour, sounding the human and universal note.

This brief foreword has no office of exploitation ; it does not assume to pass final judgment on style or matter, nor to beguile the so-called “gentle reader” into paths of another’s choosing. It is, in my own thought, more as if I were taking in mine the hand of a younger author, a stranger, and in introducing her to a new audience, bespeaking for her in advance the welcome she is sure to win later on for herself.

Any one who ever cared for the simple histories of Timothy, Carol, Polly Oliver, or Rebecca, will delight in Mrs. Harker’s winsome portrayals of Paul and Fiammetta, — the family chronicles being set

*down by a certain modest little person
named "Janey," who, if not the most
fascinating and beautiful member of the
household, is one of the most lovable.*

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN.

*New York,
January 30, 1906.*

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*I count myself in nothing else so happy,
As in a soul rememb'ring my good friends !*

KING RICHARD II.

CONCERNING PAUL AND FIAMMETTA

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF FIAMMETTA

The river, on from mill to mill,
Flows past our childhood's garden still:
But, ah! we children never more
Shall watch it from the water-door!
Below the yew it still is there —
Our phantom voices haunt the air
As we were still at play,
And I can hear them call and say:
"How far is it to Babylon?"

Ah, far enough, my dear,
Far, far enough from here —
Yet you have farther gone!
"Can I get there by candlelight?"
So goes the old refrain.
I do not know — perchance you might —
But only children hear it right.
Ah! never to return again!
The eternal dawn beyond a doubt,
Shall break on hill and plain,
And put all stars and candles out,
Ere we be young again. — R. L. S.

"LET the filly run in the grass while her legs
are so long and her body so little. She'll
settle to the collar none the worse by and

bye because she's had plenty of galloping now."

It was of me father spoke, not of one of the foals. He always answered thus when any of the nursery authorities came to him with lamentation as to "Miss Janey's" general gipsyism. So I had my fill of galloping and frisking in glad, green places, with just about as much, or as little, "spiritual life" as a merry colt in a field.

Then, suddenly, one rainy June, I made my first great friendship. For to me, the sturdy Philistine of field and hedgerow, came Fiammetta: little large-eyed Fiammetta, so slim of body, so ardent of soul. Vivid, infinitely mutable little presence, darting hither and thither in the sunshine of my childish days, lovely and luminous as some gorgeous butterfly. Her coming changed the proportion of everything. I suppose things had happened before, but they had certainly not happened to me. As we always said to one another when we tried to explain her mysterious fascination (quite unconscious then that it was fascination) "she was different

somehow" from everybody else. Assuredly her up-bringing and environment had been essentially different from our own and that of other children whom we knew.

All our child friends had the proper complement of parents. Fiammetta had only her father, with whom she had spent almost every day of her ten years.

Other children were, like ourselves, hampered by endless restrictions in the way of nurseries, schoolrooms, nurses, and governesses. Fiammetta had known nothing of such thralldom. To begin at the very beginning of things, she was born in Florence, and there got what nurse called her "strange, outlandish name."

Even our mild sabbatarianism was a puzzle to her, and she could never be made to understand why church on Sundays was imperative, to the exclusion of other days, — this latter lack of comprehension was most bewildering to us. It seemed that she had been to church on all sorts of days and in all kinds of places, but hardly ever on Sundays: assuredly the only proper day to our thinking.

Another striking point of dissimilarity was that we had never been allowed, far less encouraged, to talk at lunch when we had it downstairs in the dining-room. Fiammetta talked incessantly, and no one rebuked her.

Besides her innumerable peculiarities of manner and opinion, she never looked in the least like anybody else. In some incomprehensible, illusive fashion, she always looked like a picture, and whether in house or garden, field or copse, her surroundings seemed to form, in some strange, subtle fashion, her background, while she herself was the conspicuous, dominant, central figure. All her frocks were blue, that deep Madonna blue that Rafael loved: all of some soft, thin, woollen material, that fell in gracious folds, and quite unlike the starchy cotton frocks of other little girls. I don't remember that as children we thought her pretty, but grown-up people seemed to admire her very much,—only another instance, we thought, of their curious enthusiasms.

We excused certain of her eccentricities because her father was a poet, and in some

dim, humble fashion we accorded certain privileges even to the belongings of genius. It is true that Mr. Glynn claimed none for himself. In our opinion he was a most superior poet, not so much on account of his poetry, which he never asked us to read, but because of his superior social qualities. He showed such a nice discrimination in his choice of friends, as when he always sought our society in preference to that of callers at afternoon tea. When he came to stay with us before he sent Fiammetta, he won all our hearts, for not only was he willing and able to play all ordinary games such as cricket or golf or tennis, but he invented others of an imaginative character; and, best of all, never seemed to mind how many hot and grubby children sprawled over him at once, — this latter, a trait that children are quick to discover and appreciate. I have heard since, that when Fiammetta did come to us, he straightway went to Norway, that he might the better resist the overwhelming temptation to rush down and see her every three days.

Much as I assuredly had always loved my

home, it was not until Fiammetta came that I realised how beautiful it was. To her, field and garden, wood and river, were a never-ending source of wonder and delight. The house, too, was something new and pleasant.

"It's so spaceful, Janey," she said in her quaint way, "and the air is always full of roses."

This was true, for, besides the great bowls of them that mother kept in hall and drawing-room, the roses literally covered the house and thrust their fragrant faces in at every window. It seemed so odd to Fiammetta that we should have such a big house just for ourselves. Except in London, where her father had a flat, she had nearly always lived in hotels, which accounted, perhaps, for her perfect ease of manner. It took us quite a long time to get used to Fiammetta; for many days we could not make up our minds whether we liked her or not. But she took us for granted with the most amazing coolness. She had heard "all about us" from her father, and considered that there was no more to learn.

With Fiammetta, her father's opinion was conclusive, and when she said, as she was wont to say hundreds of times a day, "my daddie says," or "my daddie thinks," we knew that further argument was useless, however irritating such superior finality might be to us. There was, too, another side to this blind belief in her father's judgment. He apparently approved of us highly, and Fiammetta came prepared to love us all. Who could fail to be disarmed by such a pronouncement as this, made some two hours after her arrival? — "My daddie says you will be my dearest friend. He thinks you are the nicest little girl he knows, except me, and your hair is like the Sleeping Beauty's, it's so long — only it ought to be black, not yellow. Do take it out of that pigtail thing and let me see! No, it would be a pity to have it black, it's such a lovely colour as it is."

Now my family were not in the habit of paying me compliments, and the experience was as agreeable as it was novel.

There were four of us, and Fiammetta; she was our visitor, and, like a certain politician

since raised to the peerage, "a most important person," both in her own opinion and that of several other people. I used to think that she attracted so much attention because she was always dressed in blue, but Paul said it was because she was so "curus." She certainly both looked and acted quite differently from any other little girl of our acquaintance.

I say "were," not because any of us are dead, but because at that time none of us had reached the state of development mysteriously referred to by nurses and governesses as "teens." Once you get into those treacherous teens you are grown up before you know where you are.

Sometimes it happens this way: On holidays your eldest brother returns from school as usual, and next morning, instead of coming to sit on the end of your bed to rux and gossip when you both ought to be getting up, he remains chillingly aloof in his own room with locked doors. And presently it appears that he is actually possessed of razors (not to cut useful things like magazines or string—he only cuts *himself* when he arrives at that

stage!), with which he shaves solemnly every morning, not because he likes it, poor chap, but because if he did n't, he would look "a frowsty freak."

My hair went up—my only consolation was that I was able to take out all the hair-pins with a magnet—and my frocks grew down, before I knew what was really happening, and "hold and below," as Paul used to say, I had quite unwittingly and for ever left that golden land where "days were long as twenty days are now." But, at all events, we can keep tight hold of our memories.

No one can take from us the good times we have had.

Therefore I say again, put up your pleasant memories in lavender; take them out and look at them from time to time. See to it that they are kept fresh and sweet, for their price is above rubies.

Here follow some of mine.

I remember the summer that Fiammetta spent with us particularly well, because it was Harry's last before he went to school.

He did n't do lessons with Paul and Fiammetta and me, though, but went every day to the vicar to be taught with Claude, his son.

Harry and Claude, so Fiammetta said, were dreadfully "matter-of-fact," which, being interpreted, meant that they were sensible, rather slow-thinking, ordinary boys, not easily stirred to violent emotion of any kind, nor given to enthusiasm about the unfamiliar.

Claude, for instance, strongly objected to acting plays in which his chief rôle was to catch Fiammetta when she fainted. Once he went so far as to decline an invitation to tea on this very score. Now, Fiammetta adored tragedy, and loved to impersonate characters overborne with grief, to stagger across an imaginary stage in a fainting condition, finally falling, apparently lifeless, into any sympathetic arms held out to receive her.

Once in a way that was all very well, and on the first two or three occasions we applauded her histrionic powers with respectful astonishment; but custom stales even the most infinite variety of fainting fits, and Harry and Claude rebelled. Whereupon

Fiammetta scornfully declared that they had "no imagination." This reproach troubled us little, however, inasmuch as one of our number, Paul, had quite enough of that commodity to stock several families—in fact, as Harry said, "You never can tell with Paul whether a thing's true or out of his own head; and, what's worse, I don't believe he can, either."

When Fiammetta first came we rather resented her extremely "grown-up" manner, but we speedily discovered that, after all, it only was manner; she was a very real child underneath, and brought with her so many new possibilities in the way of play that, once our resentment of her patronage had passed away, we followed blindly where she led.

It seemed so marvellous to us that anyone only ten years old could have seen so much of men and cities; and her pleasant familiarity with places grudgingly recognised by us as so many pink or green patches on a map was a never-ending source of wonder and delight.

She had a great attraction for older people: Miss Goodlake, our governess, was hardly

ever cross with Fiammetta, and I never remember so many invitations to tea all about the country as while she was with us. Why, during her very first week the Poet — But that needs a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER II

FIAMMETTA AND THE POET

Vex not thou the poet's mind
With thy shallow wit :
Vex not thou the poet's mind,
For thou can'st not fathom it.

LORD TENNYSON.

JUST as we were finishing lessons mother came into the schoolroom with an open letter in her hand.

"Fiammetta," she said, "our Poet wants to see you."

Fiammetta lifted a flushed face from the "composition" she was finishing.

"Well, I'm sure I shall be very pleased to see him," she said graciously; "is he downstairs?"

Mother laughed. "No, he is not downstairs, nor does he propose doing himself the honour of calling upon you. He wants me to take you over to see him. Listen:

"I hear that Geoffrey Glynn's little daughter is staying with you, and as I would greatly

like to see the child, I wonder if you would drive her and your own daughter, who, I understand, is of about the same age, over to see us one afternoon. It seems asking a great deal, but you know how Mrs. Belton and I are shut off from all ordinary social intercourse by our wretched health. The dreadful part of it is that even if you are kind enough to come, should it be one of my bad days, I would not dare to give myself the pleasure of seeing you. Will you of your charity chance it? It is a beautiful drive, and my wife and I will do our very best to keep well enough to see you. In any case Jocosa is there to see that you have tea comfortably.' ”

“ Who is Jocosa ? ” asked Fiammetta, interested in the name ; “ she sounds cheerful.”

“ Jocosa,” said mother, smiling a little as at some amusing recollection, “ is a lady who lives with Mr. and Mrs. Belton, and looks after things for them ; she, too, writes.”

“ Poetry ? ”

“ No ; novels and stories. It is a very literary household.”

"What does Mrs. Belton do?"

"Oh," said mother, pausing a moment as if trying to think, "she worships Mr. Belton, and exists beautifully."

I do not think either of us understood what she meant, but it sounded very mysterious and superior, and we both wanted to go.

We called him "our Poet" because he happened to live in the neighbourhood, but few people ever saw him: firstly, because he was such an invalid; secondly, because the Garsetshire people on the whole were disinclined to bow down to anyone merely because he was a poet, and, from what I have heard since, Mr. Belton liked and expected a good deal of homage from his acquaintances.

Fiammetta seemed to know all manner of people who wrote books, and painted pictures, and even acted in real theatres, and she took the invitation quite calmly. Besides, it always seemed to her perfectly natural that people should want to see her. If she was driving with us in Garchester, and people stared at her, as they frequently did, she would smile.

ingly bow to them in the most gracious fashion possible, greatly to their astonishment, and greatly to ours; if the starers happened to be men, they almost invariably capped her in return.

All the way to Hamels Manor, where the Poet lived, mother kept smiling to herself, but she never would tell us what was amusing her. Father had stood on the steps just as we were starting, and called out:

“Little blue maid, you ask him to knock you off a sonnet while you’re there!”

It was certainly a long drive, over ten miles, and by the time we turned in at the Poet’s gate Fiammetta and I were very tired of it. The baying of a great hound announced our arrival, and we noticed on the left-hand side of the drive, in a clearance made in a little copse at some distance from the house, a tawny mastiff flinging its huge bulk against the bars of a cage as big as the lion’s cage in a menagerie.

It was part of the Poet’s “state and circumstance” to keep this unfortunate beast, of whom everybody, including the Poet himself,

was afraid. It never went out except on the leash, and then only for a short walk in the grounds. Consequently, it was very savage, and made the most terrible uproar whenever any of the Poet's visitors approached the house.

This house was very pretty. It had an air of immemorial stillness, and its gray-stone front seemed mellow with the sunshine of many summers.

"It's like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty," Fiammetta whispered to me as we crossed the cool hall to the drawing-room.

It seemed that we waited a long time till a lady, dark and melancholy, whose dress was of some kind of soft voluminous muslin, "mystic, wonderful," came in and greeted us in the breathless whispering voice used by the laity in church. She impressed upon mother how fragile were both Mr. and Mrs. Belton, and how greatly she feared that the pleasure of seeing us, "the excitement" (I remember feeling rather flattered that my advent could be exciting to anyone), would exact heavy tribute afterwards in the shape of shattered

nerves. This was Jocosa, and never seemed name so singularly inapt.

"Why are you so hushified?" asked Fiammetta loudly, and with her usual directness.

The lady smiled sadly down at her, saying gravely :

"Because I am so afraid of disturbing or upsetting Mr. Belton."

"Don't you get very tired of it?" asked Fiammetta sympathetically.

The lady looked quite shocked, and remarked severely :

"People who are privileged to come in contact with Mr. Belton think it an honour to consider his comfort in every possible way."

"Dear me!" said Fiammetta, quite unabashed ; "how very jolly for him!"

Jocosa looked at her with the utmost surprise, and mother, whose eyes somehow kept laughing in the midst of her absolutely grave face, hastened to change the subject by inquiring after Mrs. Belton.

It was a very silent house ; the mastiff's ululations had ceased, and there was no sound

but the patter of our footsteps as we again crossed the stone-flagged hall to go to our interview with Mr. Belton.

Jocosa opened a heavily-curtained door, and I followed mother and Fiammetta into a large, beautiful room, where two people lay stretched on sofas: one by the open, shaded window, the other by a fire which burnt brightly in spite of the hot June sunshine outside. Lying on the window sofa was a lady, such a pretty lady, with a kind and gentle face framed in masses of dark hair. She was very pale and certainly looked ill, and she, too, was dressed, like Jocosa, in that curiously voluminous soft muslin. I remember that while Jocosa's was white, hers had little pale gray flowers running all over it. This was Mrs. Belton. On the other sofa lay the Poet. He wore a velvet coat, a smoking-cap with a crimson tassel, and had a striped Italian blanket spread over his knees. His hair fell in ringlets over his shoulders and his face, which, like that of his wife, was very kind and gentle, made me think of church and stained-glass windows and St. John.

For once Fiammetta's beautiful manners de-

serted her, and, instead of going forward to shake hands with him, she stood in the middle of the room staring, much as the village children stared at her.

Neither the Poet nor his wife got up to greet us; we were presented to each of them by Jocosa, with so much reverence that it would not have surprised me in the least had she commanded us to kneel down and kiss their hands. The Poet, by the way, kissed mother's hand when she went away.

"So you are Geoffrey Glynn's little daughter," he said to Fiammetta, when we had subsided on to chairs like ordinary mortals.

"Of course I am," she answered cheerfully. "Have you any little girls?"

"Alas, no," said the Poet, and he really did look very sad.

"What a pity! I'm so sorry." Then, with a sudden change from her commiserating tone:

"Do you make poetry every day? Have you made any to-day? I've never read any of your poetry. Do you think I'd like it? because if you do I'll ask my daddie to get it for me."

The Poet looked rather astonished, but he said courteously :

"I question whether you would understand it as yet, but —— "

"Oh," interrupted Fiammetta, "my daddie says that the best poetry is always simple ; so if yours is the best kind I'm sure I should understand it. What's it about?"

The Poet sank back upon his pillows and passed a thin white hand over his forehead, murmuring :

"What an extraordinary child!"

And Jocosa, who seemed to spend her life in watching his every movement, interposed anxiously with :

"I fear she is tiring you, dear. You *must* be careful. Shall I take her away?"

"No, no," he said, "not yet. She interests me ; but she is very unlike what I expected."

They spoke of Fiammetta exactly as if she were not there, or else was stone-deaf ; and she did not like it, for she said somewhat loudly :

"What *did* you expect? Don't you like me?"

"Very much, my child—very much indeed," said the Poet hastily, and I'm sure he was genuinely anxious to spare her feelings in every way. "But, you see, I don't often meet with little girls, unfortunately, and they are apt to come upon me as more or less of a surprise."

"Can you play upon that?" she asked suddenly, pointing to a harp that stood in a corner of the room.

Immediately there was a great commotion, for the Poet expressed his willingness to oblige Fiammetta. Jocosa and mother moved the harp over beside his sofa—it was very big and heavy. The Poet swung his legs into a sitting posture—it was a relief to find that he could sit up; we all settled into our places again, and the pretty lady in the window and Jocosa clasped their hands and bent forward to gaze at the Poet as devotees to whom some long-worshipped saint had suddenly manifested himself. Then he smote the strings.

I suppose I am a Philistine, for there came over me a dreadful hysterical inclination to

shriek with laughter. I fixed my eyes on the carpet, getting hotter and hotter and redder and redder in my terror lest this dreadful impulse should become too strong for me ; so I saw nothing of the effect his performance had on mother and Fiammetta. There did not seem to be any tune, and it sounded, as Fiammetta afterwards remarked, "like rain in Kitty's tinny." Happily, it did not last long, and when it was over, and I had not disgraced myself, I heaved a great sigh of relief and dared to raise my eyes to the faces of the others.

"She, too, has an artistic soul," said the Poet, pointing at me. "I could see that the child was affected by my music."

After that we went with Jocosa to tea, and the Poet got off the sofa and opened the door for us, in spite of Jocosa's protestations.

Just before we left, we were allowed to go and say good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Belton. The Poet gave each of us a volume of his poetry, in which he had himself written our names and his own. On receipt of this gift Fiammetta kissed him warmly, saying :

"Try and get well, you poor dear : it must

be so pokey lying here all day: but I'm glad you can walk—at first I feared you could n't."

As we drove out of the drive gate, Fiammetta flung herself upon mother, exclaiming:

"Please, please, dear Mrs. Staniland, may Janey and me sing 'Rule Britannia' very loud?"

"You may," said mother, and we did, for quite three miles.

That evening, as we were describing our adventures to father, Fiammetta said:

"And the music was just as hushified as the rest of it. I'm glad my dear daddie is a good, strong poet."

As we went upstairs to bed I heard mother say:

"If David played before Saul like that, I don't wonder Saul threw a javelin at him."

CHAPTER III

THE VAGARIES OF PAUL

As from the house your mother sees
You playing round the garden trees,
So you may see, if you will look
Through the windows of this book,
Another child, far, far away,
And in another garden, play.
But do not think you can at all,
By knocking at the window, call
That child to hear you. He intent
Is all on his play business bent.
He does not hear; he will not look,
Nor yet be lured out of this book.
For, long ago, the truth to say,
He has grown up and gone away,
And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there.

A Child's Garden of Verses.

TO say "Paul was peculiar" sounds rather like "A was an apple-pie"; nevertheless, it was true.

"Pretendering," as he called it, was a passion with him, and verily he sought out many inventions. Not even the most far-seeing of governesses or nurses could attempt to forbid

all the extraordinary things it entered into the heart of Paul to do, and when vials of governmental wrath were emptied on his devoted head, by reason of some departure more than usually disastrous, he would, as it were, turn the other cheek to the smiter, saying with injured meekness: "But nobody never told me not to."

Mr. Glynn, Fiammetta's father, who was a poet, but all the same the most understanding and delightful of men, used to say that Paul was the best company of anybody he knew, and when he stayed with us would seek that small boy's society upon every possible occasion.

Fiammetta was by no means equally charmed with Paul. They were too much alike in many ways to be really great friends. But while Paul had had some of his corners rubbed off by intimate association with the rest of his family, and, expecting neither sympathy nor admiration, went his own queer way in serene carelessness of other people's opinions, Fiammetta, who till she came to us had never been brought into close relationship

with any other children, both expected and exacted much more in the way of understanding and approbation than we were able or willing to give her. She was consumed by a wholly altruistic desire to please, but equally did she like to be *told* that she pleased, and in that direction we fell far short of her requirements.

Paul took the affection of his family for granted, but it was his imaginary friend Tonks who was his real *fidus Achates*. He and the dogs shared all Paul's adventures, his joys, and his sorrows.

"Tonks is a true friend," Paul would exclaim in an aggravating voice, that inferred none of us were: "he is thoroughly to be trusted: nurse never finds out anything from *him*."

"I'm sure nurse never finds out anything from the rest of us, either," Harry replied, angrily. "What d' you mean?"

"Never mind," Paul answered with dignified obscurity — "Tonks and I know."

Whereupon Harry smacked Paul's head and the subject dropped.

We could n't get rid of Tonks: his perfect personality was imposed upon us against our wills, and we could never get at him to punch him or express our disapproval in any tangible form. His creator's belief in him was so profound that it infected the rest of us, and no one who has not had a brother like Paul can realise the constant irritation that an imaginary Admirable Crichton, who does everything better than anybody else, can be to an otherwise common-sensical family.

Did anyone mention a good score at cricket, say by "W. G." himself, Paul would airily remark: "Ah! Tonks hit seven boundaries last time he played for Garsetshire; his score was two hundred and fifty, and he carried his bat."

If any sporting friend described the best run of the season, Paul would afterwards remark confidentially to us: "Tonks was out that day, too. You know where they came to that frightful bullfinch with the six-foot drop on the other side, and the whole field had to go round by the gap lower down? Well, Tonks put his horse at it, and they simply

flew over; he lost his hat, though, the wind they made was so strong, but he was up with the hounds long before anybody else."

"You told us a little while ago," Harry objected, "that he could n't go into the cavalry because he was so heavy — the Sergeant said so. How do you make out now that he's so straight across country? You can't have a horse up to tremendous weight that's a jumper too, you know."

But Paul was never at a loss where his favourite was concerned.

"He's ever so much finner since he had the measles; he lost stones and stones," he said solemnly. "He could ride Jerry now, he's so light."

It was of no use to contradict him. We could n't *prove* that Tonks was n't there, and if in moments of annoyance we waxed sceptical, declaring that there was "no sich person," Paul pitied our limitations so loftily, and so plumed himself upon his superior powers of vision, that in sheer desperation we gave in, and declared that we, too, knew Tonks.

As a matter of fact, we did. He was much

realler than many real persons I have known since. Tonks won prizes at all the tennis tournaments in the neighbourhood, and in the gymnasium no one could touch him. The truth was that Paul endowed his foster-brother with all those qualities of size and strength and prowess in which he, himself, was most lacking, being somewhat small and delicate, and by no means very courageous, except in imagination.

It is against all the canons of a right-minded small boy to boast of his own doings, but it is quite legitimate to blow the trumpet to any extent in celebration of the successes of a friend.

There was only one field of endeavour in which the great Tonks did not shine. His arithmetic was deplorable; and as Paul's was almost equally bad, that youngster found considerable comfort in the fact that, if two-thirds of his sums were as a rule wrong, "*all* Tonks' sums were in a perfectly hopeless muddow" always. But if somewhat deficient in the practice of the exact sciences, Tonks and his creator both excelled in the gentler arts, and

burst into poetry upon the smallest provocation, and the odd thing was, that although so far as meaning went Paul's verses were generally the most extravagant nonsense, yet they always scanned, as he said them. His sense of the sound of rhythm was so acute that I don't think he could have composed a halting line. Bad rhymes, too, annoyed him dreadfully, and he had been known to groan out loud in church during hymns where (as is frequently the case) such rhymes as "love" and "move," "arise" and "enemies" (that hymn comes in Home Missions), "morn" and "return," occurred.

"It aches me," he said upon one occasion, when rebuked by Miss Goodlake for his disapproval in this fashion — "you can't think how it aches me, and I'm positive God *can't* be pleased with those words. You would n't like them to sing about *you* in poetry like that, would you?"

"It does n't matter about the words, Paul dear," Miss Goodlake replied in a shocked tone, "if the intention is good, and all hymns are excellent in intention."

"Father says it's not much use meaning well if you don't do it," Paul argued, unconvinced. "I think they must be wicked men that make those kind of hymns — I do indeed. They ache me, I tell you, and I can't keep quiet."

"Why don't you make some hymns yourself, then?" asked Harry the practical.

"I do — in bed at night," Paul answered cheerfully. "But, you see, they don't sing my hymns in church, and that's what annoys me so."

Paul's Muse, however, preferred light verse to the more serious forms of poetry, although he did occasionally burst forth into Miltonic metre. On the whole, that of Lewis Carroll was what he preferred. He never attempted to write anything down, for writing was as yet a difficult art, only to be approached reverently at a large table, with everything handsome about it. But in field and garden Paul "dropped into poetry" on the smallest provocation.

One day, while strolling tea-wards with the rest of us through one of the fields,

where many cows were grazing, he chanted solemnly :

“ And as he walked he wondered how
That fearsome bull, or, rather, cow,
Could keep itself from then till now
On nothing but the grass.

“ And, further on, he met a man,
Whose hair was gray, and black, and tan,
While in each hand he waved a fan,
Although he wore an astrachan.”

It lasted all the way home, I remember, and I know we thought it rather clever of Paul to be able to do it, and he capered along, chanting his lines, in the greatest glee and good-humour.

All the windows in our house, except in the drawing-room, where they came right down to the ground, had seats — deep, comfortable, cushioned seats. Most sensible people, if they have to sit indoors, like to do so where they can see as much as possible of the dear, beautiful outside. But Paul liked to sit in a window-seat — not that he might see out, but that he might read in peace. He was far too fond of reading, nurse thought, and if she

found him with a book would always take it away from him, and chivy him off to play out-of-doors. He used to read at meals if he got the chance, keeping the book on his knee, and glancing down at it surreptitiously between the courses. One day he tried it at tea, but Miss Goodlake, our governess, caught him at once, and remonstrated, deploring his lack of sociability.

"It's so rude of you, Paul," she lamented. "Why can't you make yourself agreeable and join in the conversation like a civilised child?"

"Your talk does n't interest me," Paul replied wearily, "and my book does, awfully."

He had a dreadful way, too, of paying no attention at all while Miss Goodlake was giving us the daily Scripture lesson, with the result that when she came to ask him questions he gave the most astonishing answers, as when he defined "what was meant by the mammon of unrighteousness" as "an unnatural animal who does not lay eggs."

When he was interested, no one was quicker or more intelligent than Paul, but only too

often he was not in the least interested, and his replies to Miss Goodlake's questions were a hazy jumble of things he had heard as in a dream, having no sort of connection with one another.

Our governess was very fond of giving us what she called "useful knowledge," and as a means to that end would ask us questions out of an antiquated little fat book with marbled boards, like a ledger, entitled "Child's Guide." We usually wandered in this particular field of research—a large field it was, too—directly after Catechism in morning school, and while we were doing the piece about "Coral" Paul got the question, "How many different kinds of coral are there?"

"Three only," he replied in a triumphant singsong, "as generally necessary to salvation. Red, white, and blue. But blue 'is the rarest and most esteemed.'"

Miss Goodlake was really angry with him, because she thought he was trying to make fun of the Catechism. He wasn't—not a bit of it. But "the answer trickled through his head like water through a sieve," and the

abrupt "three" of the response in "Child's Guide" set him off on a wrong track.

She complained to mother on this occasion, who sent for Paul, and spoke to him very seriously about his inattention and general idleness. When she had finished — Paul was like father in that one thing, he never interrupted a long discourse — he gazed at her, and asked sorrowfully :

"Why should life all labour be?"

And mother, who knew her "Lotus-eaters," was fain to laugh.

The only answer in "Child's Guide" that met with his ungrudging concurrence was the one apropos of "slates used by young persons to cipher on," which solemnly italicises a portion of the statement that "Arithmetic was considered so complex in the time of the Saxons in England that it was said to be a study *too difficult for the mind of man.*"

When Paul wanted to read in absolutely undisturbed seclusion, he would, if possible, secrete himself in the window-seat of mother's bedroom behind the curtains. It was a safe and sheltered haven, inasmuch as nurses and

governesses hardly ever went into mother's room.

One evening that summer about six o'clock there came a telegraph-boy to our front-door. He rang loudly, as is the wont of telegraph-boys, and Eliza duly carried the yellow missive to mother in the drawing-room.

Father was out.

The telegram required an answer, and before mother could possibly write one the bell pealed again, and she heard an indignant voice demanding to see the master.

She came out into the hall, and there was the telegraph-boy, very red and angry, with water dripping from his cap and standing in shining drops upon his shoulders, while a series of unseemly splashes marred the fairness of the steps outside.

It was an indignant and outraged telegraph-boy, who proclaimed loudly that he "was a gov'ment hofficial molested in the discharge of 'is bounden dooty."

"But who has molested you?" mother wonderingly inquired, "and where does all that water come from?"

“That’s just wot I wants to know, mum,” the molested one replied. “Someone ’as bin an’ throwed a bucket of water on my ’ead from a hupper window.”

Mother came out on to the steps and gazed up at the window indicated, directly above the hall door.

It was her own.

“I think,” the government official continued, “as a little bye did throw it. I jest ketched a glimpse of ’im a-grinnin’ be’ind the curting w’en I did look hup.”

“A little boy,” mother repeated in dismayed tones. “But that’s *my* bedroom window.”

“I seed un there all the same, mum, and I shell ’ave to complain to the postmaster, that I shell. ’E won’t ’ave none of ’is staff wetted so shameful on a fine hevenin’.”

“I’m very sorry,” mother said, as she continued to gaze thoughtfully upwards.

Then, bidding the boy wait where he was while she made inquiries, she went swiftly into the house again and up the stairs into her own room.

Paul was sitting on her bed, shaking with

laughter, an empty water-bottle clasped firmly in his hand.

Of course, he knew why mother had come, and his giggles ceased instantly.

"Paul, what possessed you to do it?" mother exclaimed breathlessly, for she had run upstairs very fast indeed.

"Mother darling, it was n't a bucket: *that's* a wicked story. It was only a nice little bottle of clean drinking-water — not quite full, either. I could n't help it. He made such a row, and roused me up, and then I peeped out, and he looked so dry and shiny, and he did skip so. . . ." And the graceless Paul relapsed into more giggles at the recollection.

He was marched off downstairs to prostrate himself in apology before the outraged officer, and then was sent to bed for the rest of the evening.

It was an unfortunate time that Paul had chosen for his prank, for only the week before Nero, the black retriever, had tried to bite the postman, and it seemed as if we were doomed to offend all the post-office people together, the postman having declared that if we "left

sich savage beastesses loose about the place we'd 'ave to fetch our letters our own selves."

If Paul happened to be scolded about anything just before a meal, he would eat next to nothing, which was distressing to the authorities. He never seemed to mind being hungry, a thing the rest of us could in no wise understand. He didn't sulk: he was perfectly smiling and even unusually obliging and polite, but he would not eat, and poor Miss Goodlake plied him with delicacies in vain.

"Why d'you do it, Paul?" I asked him one day, after some such exhibition of obstinacy. "You know you wanted strawberries and cream all the time. Whatever do you punish yourself like that for?"

"'Tis n't me that's *most* punished," he replied, wagging his head wisely, "and they daren't be cross again for quite a long time after."

CHAPTER IV

HARRY AND MISS ABRAHAMS

A good fellow withal, and would strike. In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents.

CHARLES LAMB.

“THE queerest people take a fancy to Harry,” Fiammetta said one day — “people who don’t seem to care much about the rest of us at all. I wonder how it is!”

“I don’t see what you mean about ‘queerest people,’ ” Paul objected.

He might be ready enough to find fault with Harry himself, but he had the greatest admiration for him, all the same, and resented the implied criticism of Fiammetta’s tone.

“Well, there’s Sergeant’s wife: she adores him.”

“Anyhow, *she* is n’t queer,” Paul retorted indignantly. “She’s very pretty and very good — mother says so.”

“Well, *she* is. But Miss Abrahams, now; she’s queer enough, if you like, and she al-

ways rushes out just to see Harry pass — you know she does.”

“I expect you’d be rather fond of Harry if you were Miss Abrahams,” I interrupted. “There’s a reason for her liking him.”

“He never told me. When I asked him why she seemed to like him so, he only said she was a funny old thing, and had queer fancies.”

“Oh, Harry would never *tell* anyone things of that sort,” Paul exclaimed scornfully. “He’s not that sort of chap — rather not.”

“Then, I can’t see what I’ve said that you should both seem so huffy about it,” Fiammetta replied snappishly. “Queer people *do* like Harry, so there!”

And Fiammetta stalked off down the garden-path to seek solace in the sympathetic society of Miss Goodlake, too dignified even to look over her shoulder to see if we were crushed by her argument.

There was no denying that Miss Abrahams was queer-looking: very little, bent nearly double, wearing the poke bonnet and Paisley shawl of a bygone time, with a wrinkled,

mummy-like face, she looked hundreds of years old, and what was singularly unpleasing in her appearance was the fact that the rims of her eyes were always red and inflamed, and her spectacles, being large and round, magnified this affliction to a really terrifying extent.

Miss Abrahams kept a second-hand clothes shop at the corner of a road near the docks, up which we turned every time we drove into Garchester. Father said that she had been there as long as he could remember, and people said that she was very rich, although she lived by herself and looked so shabby and poor, and that she was really a miser. Sometimes there were other things in her window than musty-looking clothes, and father bought things from her from time to time, such as old silver candle-sticks, snuffers, and the like ; so that whenever she had anything pretty of the kind she would stand out at her door and stop him as he passed. One day she took him into the living part of her house to show him some Chippendale chairs, and he told us that, in spite of the dingy-looking shop in front, the house itself was clean and beautiful

beyond belief, full of charming old things, and that she herself was "a most intelligent and agreeable old lady." She didn't speak like a poor person (but, then, very few Jewesses do), and it seems that it pleased her very much that father had brought us all up to give her greeting when we saw her. Paul was especially respectful and effusive in his salutations, because he was secretly convinced that she was a witch (she certainly looked like one), and could change him into any mortal thing with a wave of her green umbrella.

Now, it happened that just before Easter, in the year before Fiammetta came to stay with us, Harry had to ride into Garchester three or four times a week to do Latin with a tutor, as the vicar was ill and could not take him, and he rode a rather fidgety little cob that father had just bought for mother. He always went by himself, as he had ridden alone ever since he was six, put up the cob at some livery-stables near his tutor's, and rode back after his lesson about tea-time.

One very wet Saturday, just as he was turning Miss Abrahams' corner, he noticed a

crowd of lads evidently pursuing something in a narrow lane that ran at right angles to the road he took. They were making a tremendous row, and shouting with laughter. Harry pulled up to see what the joke was. The cob Jerry, homeward bound, and fresh after his rest, curveted uneasily from side to side, so that it was a full minute before Harry made out that somebody or other was being tormented, and was standing in a doorway trying to protect something else from the onslaughts of the boys, and that both were getting decidedly the worst of it. Harry turned into the lane, holding Jerry in with difficulty, and rode slowly towards the little crowd.

"You let un go, missis; 'tain't no business o' yourn," he heard one big lad shouting.

"You won't get nowt for 'er skin, old money-grubber!" cried another.

Just then the crowd round the doorway broke, and Harry caught a glimpse of the bent figure of a little old woman trying to creep along by the wall, and evidently holding something under her shawl. One of the

younger boys let fly a stone, and it hit her on the head, nearly knocking her bonnet off, and Harry saw that the old woman was Miss Abrahams.

There were five or six lads, all bigger than he was, but that mattered nothing to Harry. Cruelty of any kind always put him in a white rage, and in a flash he realised that it was a hunted cat that the old woman hid under her shawl. He knew that she was unpopular, for father had said so, and in that part of Garchester there is never a policeman of any kind, although, curiously enough, it is not a quarter of a mile from the gaol. Harry rode in amongst the boys, and laid about him with his crop. The cob, almost crazy with excitement, began to rear. For a moment the boys were too astonished at this unexpected interference to resent it.

“Go home, Miss Abrahams!” Harry shouted. “I’ll settle these chaps.”

Miss Abrahams lifted her bleared eyes to her deliverer, and, fully as terrified of the prancing Jerry as of her original tormentors, followed his advice, and scuttled down the

lane as fast as her old legs would carry her.

Then began what proved to be a bad five minutes for Harry. It would have been easy enough to ride off and leave the lot of them, but he wanted to see that Miss Abrahams got safely into her house before he did that, and the house was distant fully five minutes' walk.

Two lads grasped his reins in front, and two more soon succeeded in pulling him off his saddle. He managed to keep hold of his crop, however, and, slipping his reins over his arm as he fell, scrambled to his feet and laid about him with the butt-end. It would have gone hard with Harry but that Jerry, in a perfect paroxysm of terror, suddenly began to kick, and caught one of Harry's enemies such a severe blow on the knee that the lad dropped howling, and rolled over and over in the mud in agony.

"'E've broke my leg, 'e 'ave! I'll 'ave the law on 'im, I will!" bellowed the injured one.

And Harry, taking advantage of the momentary distraction, vaulted into the saddle,

dug his heels into the indignant Jerry, who shook his head free of the lads' restraining clutch, and broke into a hand-gallop. As Harry flew by Miss Abrahams' house he noticed that every window was shuttered.

A shower of stones followed him, some hitting Jerry, and one struck the back of Harry's head so sharply as to cut it open, since when he has always had a little patch of gray hair in the middle of the brown.

Over the two bridges Jerry thundered, flecked with foam, nor did he slow down till within about half a mile of home. Then it was that Harry, feeling something warmer than the rain trickling down his neck, put up his hand and found that it was blood. He was covered with mud from head to foot, and felt queer and dizzy now that the excitement of his wild ride was over. He had passed but few people on the road, and one and all shouted at him; but he said he couldn't have pulled Jerry up even if he had wanted to.

As he neared the house it occurred to him that if mother saw him coming up the drive

in his present state she would be very much frightened, so he turned off into a side-road that leads into a cart-track, and reached the stables in that way. When he got there the men had gone to tea, for it was an understood thing in our family that whichever of the children rode must stable the "gee" himself.

No one was in the stable-yard ; the servants were all at tea, and to poor Harry, stiff and sore and dizzy, it seemed an almost impossible feat even to get off Jerry, and yet he knew that the game little cob ought to be rubbed down at once. His head ached dreadfully, and there was a singing in his ears.

"I'm afraid I must get someone," he said to himself, and yet seemed incapable of doing anything but ride aimlessly round the stable-yard, to the astonishment of Jerry, who wanted a feed.

Now, nurse always declares that if anything ever happens to any of us, "she feels it in her bones"; and it is quite true that on this particular evening, while she was sitting at tea in the nursery with Lucy, it suddenly occurred to her that she had not heard Harry go along

the passage to the schoolroom, nor had he, as usual, brought her in his wet covert coat to be dried. So, leaving Lucy contentedly eating bread and jam in her high chair, she ran along to the schoolroom, where we were having tea, to see whether Harry had come back. We were not much concerned at his absence, for he had been late on more than one occasion when he had had messages to do for father in Garchester after his lesson.

To get to the schoolroom from the nursery you had to pass the one upstairs window that looks on to the stable-yard; it was standing open, and the rain was driving in. Before shutting it, nurse put her head out to see if Harry had come back, and saw him riding slowly round and round the yard.

"What are you doing, dawdling there in the wet, Master Harry?" she called out.

He turned his white, muddy face up to her, and mumbled something that she could not hear; but she caught sight of the long, dark stain on the back of his covert coat. She ran down the passage, putting her head into the schoolroom door as she passed just to say:

"You give a look to Miss Lucy for a minute, Miss Janey; I must go downstairs."

"Really nurse forgets herself," said Miss Goodlake indignantly (no governess ever got on with nurse). "What can she mean by interrupting tea in such a summary fashion?"

But none of us ever dreamt of disobeying nurse, and I rose immediately to do her bidding.

As I went along the passage to the nursery, I, too, noticed that the rain was coming in at that window, and paused to shut it as I passed, just in time to see nurse standing in the middle of the yard in all the wet, in the act of lifting Harry off the cob. His reins were lying loose on Jerry's neck, and he swayed in his saddle, saying wearily:

"Oh, nurse, I'm so glad you've come, for it's getting darker and darker, and I can't find the stable-door."

I knew then that it was a case for mother, even if I had not heard nurse call out to someone in the kitchen, "Fetch the master, quick!" And, regardless of Lucy or anybody else, I flew downstairs and burst into the drawing-

room with the cheerful announcement, "I'm quite sure Harry's killed or something, for nurse had to *lift* him off Jerry."

Of course, there was a great commotion. Dutton was sent off post-haste for the doctor to sew up the cut in Harry's head, and for some time both father and mother thought he must have been badly thrown: he was too faint and queer at first to be bothered with any questions. Nurse undressed him and put him to bed at once, and mother bathed and bandaged the cut in his head. She sent everyone out of the room, and sat beside him so still and peaceful that he fell sound asleep till the doctor came. After his head had been sewed up he became quite cheerful and demanded his long-deferred tea, and father went in to sit beside him while he had it.

"Where were you thrown?" asked father in a casual tone, as though it was a common, daily sort of occurrence.

"*Thrown!*" Harry repeated indignantly. "I've never been thrown since I was six years old, father. Of course I was n't thrown!"

"The cob did n't come down, then," father

said quietly, "for I looked at his knees first thing. Perhaps you will kindly explain how you came to be plastered with mud from head to foot, with a hole in the back of your head. If you were n't thrown, what other game were you playing at?"

Harry looked at father, and grinned as he remarked gaily:

"I set on some louts, sir."

"*You* set on some louts," father repeated. "Why?"

"They were hunting a cat," Harry answered, still grinning, "and I did n't approve of it."

Father stared at Harry as if he wondered whether the hole in his head had affected his brain.

"But, my dear fellow, if you take it upon yourself to avenge every stray cat in so vigorous a fashion you'll have rather a busy time of it," father said at last.

"It was n't quite the cat," Harry explained. "There were other things. You'd have done the same, sir, I know. And Jerry broke one chap's leg, or I'm very much mistaken," he added gleefully.

Father looked rather grave, but he asked no more questions; and when he went away nurse took possession of Harry for the rest of the night, and would let none of us go near him.

Father had to go that evening to a men's dinner of some sort, and I was allowed to dine with mother, so that I was later than usual in going to bed; and I was not asleep after nine o'clock, when a vehicle of some sort drove up to the front-door and the bell pealed.

"Who could it be at that time of night, and on such a night?" I thought to myself; and, curiosity getting the better of me, I slipped out of bed and crept to the landing, to lean over the banisters and try to catch a glimpse of the untimely visitor.

It was like a scene in a play, I thought: the hall itself so warm and bright with lamp and ruddy firelight; the open door, with the rain lashing and driving in on the bent and seemingly suppliant figure of a queer little old woman; the parlour-maid holding the door open against the wind, evidently dubious as to admitting this strange guest. It was

with a thrill of excitement that I recognised Miss Abrahams, more weird and witch-like than ever, imploring Eliza to let her see the mistress, if only for one minute.

The drawing-room door opened and mother came out into the hall, looking so tall and fair in her long blue tea-gown, with the lamp-light burnishing her yellow hair till it shone like the big brass fender in the nursery.

"Come in, Miss Abrahams—come in out of the rain," she said in her calm, gentle voice. "You want to see me? You can go, Eliza, and tell the man to go round to the back to get shelter." And she drew Miss Abrahams towards the big settle near the fire. She did not seem in the least surprised, and spoke as though it were quite a usual thing to be visited late at night by old-clothes women. I quite forgot that I ought not to listen—I forgot even that the one was my own mother and the other Miss Abrahams. I did not even want to hear so much as to see. They were like figures in a picture, and even to my child-mind seemed types of the antipodes of womanhood, the contrast was

so striking — the one shrunken and old and friendless, blown out of the storm and darkness, a very windle-straw of desolation; the other so strong and tall and gracious in her sheltered setting of home-kingdom.

Miss Abrahams would not sit down: she stood in the middle of the hall under the lamp, clasping and unclasping her hands and looking up at mother with her red-rimmed eyes.

“Madam,” she said, “I have come to ask for the young gentleman. Did they hurt him? It was on my behalf that he interfered. It was for me that he bore their blows and their ill-usage — for *me*,” she repeated, with a sort of wonder in her soft voice.

Her voice was the most astonishing part of Miss Abrahams, for it was clear and full, the intonation pure, and she spoke like the people in Sir Walter Scott’s novels.

“I was sore pressed,” she continued, “and he rode down amongst them like an avenging angel, and I fled. But I could not rest until I knew whether they had done him a mischief. I heard the gallop of his horse as he passed

by, and the hoofs seemed to beat into my heart with anguish."

Miss Abrahams paused, and mother made a swift movement towards her.

"You have made me a very happy woman, Miss Abrahams," she said with a thrill in her voice. "It was most kind of you to come and tell me all about it."

Then she made Miss Abrahams sit down on the settle, and sat down beside her, and I could see them no more.

Once the picture was broken up, my conscience awoke and positively shouted at me that I had no sort of business to be listening there; so I went softly back to bed, but not to sleep. I lay awake for a long time, praying that my future might be like mother's, and not like Miss Abrahams'. And presently, when the cab drove away and the house was quite still, I put on my dressing-gown and bed-shoes and went downstairs.

Mother was sitting in a low chair in front of the hall fire, staring into it. For once she had no work in her busy hands, but sat quite still with them clasped on her knee. She did

not hear me coming, and at the foot of the staircase I stood for a minute looking at her. There were tears shining on her cheeks, but her eyes were very happy, and by their expression I knew that she, like Paul, had a magic place, and that she was in it then, only her magic place was very like a church, so solemn and so far-off that I could in no way reach it too, and suddenly I felt very lonely and left out.

“Mother!” I cried, “come back to me — I want you!”

In a moment she was beside me, and lifted me, great girl though I was, into her strong arms. She carried me over to her chair by the fire, and we had a lovely talk. I told her how I had watched and listened, and she was not very vexed with me, because she was so happy about Harry. I was sitting there still when father came home from his dinner, and he had to hear all about it, too; but all he said was:

“Poor old lady; she must have been in a taking to go and hire a coach. Think what it must have cost her!”

Ever after that, as long as she lived, Miss Abrahams at Passover always sent a large flat parcel of unleavened bread to Harry. It was ever so nice, thin biscuity cakes, a foot across, all over nice little brown dimples, and we used to eat it with lots of butter for nursery tea.

The boy that Jerry kicked had to go to the hospital, and mother made Harry go and see him there, and take him magazines and things, and they got quite chummy. But Jerry never quite got over his fright, for he shies at a crowd to this day.

CHAPTER V

A NEW CHIVALRY

My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.

SIR GALAHAD.

“WHAT,” asked Fiammetta, in a tone of polite inquiry, “is a dorky-bird?”

We were walking in College Green with the Voiceful Canon, who had given a hand to each of us. The occasion was a joyful one, because we were on our way to tea with him just after evensong, all by ourselves, Miss Goodlake having gone to see the dentist’s wife. How anyone could love a dentist we never could understand.

“A dorky-bird?” repeated the Voiceful Canon. “I never heard of one; I should think it must come from the same country as the Jabberwock.”

“Oh no, it does n’t,” said Fiammetta decidedly. “It’s a kind of a church bird, and you *ought* to know all about it.”

"A kind of a church bird?" the Voiceful Canon repeated again in a wondering tone. "I'm dreadfully sorry and it's doubtless very ignorant of me, but I really don't remember ever to have heard of one before. How do you know it's a church bird?"

"Well, really," said Fiammetta severely, "you can't have paid much attention to the anthem this afternoon, although you did strike that funny, buzzy thing to start them, and beat time with your little finger on that carved knob on your desk." (On Fridays there is no organ at evensong, and the Voiceful Canon always started the choir with a tuning-fork.) "Don't you remember," she went on impatiently, "how they kept on singing, 'I had rather be a dorky-bird, a dorky-bird: I had rather be a dorky-bird in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of' — something or other? So it *must* be a church bird."

The Voiceful Canon stood still under the elms and laughed, and when he laughed his voice was just as big and full as when he said the Litany, and it went echoing through

the trees right up to the top of the tower, it seemed, till it lost itself in the patch of blue sky overhead. A message-boy stood still and grinned.

Fiammetta did not like to be laughed at, so she pulled her hand away, looking very red and offended.

The Voiceful Canon hastened to apologise.

"I am so sorry," he said, "but I could n't help it, and it only confirms what I am always telling those boys, that no mortal can hear what they sing about. It's all their fault; what they were trying to say was 'doorkeeper,' but 'dorky-bird' is much nearer what they sang."

"It is what they sang," said Fiammetta, somewhat mollified, "and as they had been saying something about sparrows just before, I thought it was some other kind of bird. I can never find my places in those big Prayer-Books; besides, I don't want to sing too, I'd rather listen, and it's fidgeting to have to read a book at the same time, don't you think?"

"You ought not to need a book if they did

the service as I'd like them to," said the Voiceful Canon.

"I can always hear *you*," said Fiammetta kindly, "and I can't think why you don't read the lessons always instead of those very old gentlemen who mumble so."

By this time we had arrived at the Voiceful Canon's house, and a most curious house it was. It did not belong to him really (for he was only a minor canon, though why "minor" we could never make out), but to one of the vergers, and he lodged there in a room over an archway that had two big Gothic windows, one facing College Green, where you could see the Cathedral and the canons' houses and everybody who came into the Close, while the other looked into a little square that had a very green garden in the centre, and in the garden was a statue of a good Bishop who had been burnt there long ago. But though the Canon did n't own the house, he had his very own front-door under the archway, and leading straight up a curly stone staircase that itself led to his rooms and nowhere else, which was perhaps just as well,

considering — to quote Mrs. Verger — “the company he kep’.” For it was well known that almost every night in the week rough men and boys from the docks, the waggon works, even “the Island,” that disgrace to Garchester, were wont to come and visit the Voiceful Canon. They even followed him into the Cathedral on Sundays; and it was told how on one occasion, when his landlord, Mr. Verger, refused to see one of them standing hang-dog in the aisle waiting for a seat, the Voiceful Canon himself descended from his stall and led his queer acquaintance to another, between a solicitor and a wine merchant!

And now he unlocked his door for us: such a thick, stumpy, oaken door, all studded with black nails. We climbed the dark, curly staircase, and went into his room. In the deep window-seat that looked into the Close sat a big brindled bull-dog. Every day he sat there during service, waiting for his master to come back, and at all other times was his inseparable companion. He jumped down from the window now and came slowly towards us.

“Bors, old chap,” said the Canon, “here

are two young ladies: Fiammetta, Bors; Janey, Bors. Now you have been introduced, please shake hands with him or he will feel hurt."

Solemnly the dog offered each of us a paw; then, evidently approving of Fiammetta, he went and sat at her feet, for she had taken his seat in the window.

"You suit my room," the Canon said, smiling at her; and, indeed, even I had noticed that in the Cathedral itself, or in the quaint old houses surrounding it, Fiammetta never looked "odd," as she assuredly did everywhere else.

Seated now in the gray Gothic setting of the mullioned window, in her straight blue dress and quaint flat cap, her bright hair—so golden in its lights and oak-brown in its shadows—framing the thin oval of her face, with its big, eager, long-lashed eyes, she might have stepped straight out of a chapter of Malory, and there seemed something almost inevitable in her next remark, when she suddenly quoted:

"A square-set man and honest, kin to Sir Launcelot."

"That's why you call him Bors, I suppose. You're rather like that, too."

"Do you mean," asked the Voiceful Canon with a twinkle, "that I resemble this Bors, or the one who was 'kin to Sir Launcelot'?"

"I mean," said Fiammetta, not a whit abashed, "that you *are* 'a square-set man and honest,' a fighting-looking kind of man."

To my great surprise, the Canon blushed like a girl right up to the roots of his hair, exclaiming:

"Good gracious! do I still look so pugnacious?"

Fiammetta jumped off the window-seat and danced over to where he sat at the table, pouring boiling water into a teapot that his landlady had just brought in.

"Oh!" she cried ecstatically, "*were* you pugnacious? Did you have lots of fights before you were a dorky-bird? Tell us about the fights!"

The Canon finished pouring the boiling water into the teapot, but he forgot to shut the lid, and sat gazing down into the steam and smiling as though at some pleasant recol-

lection. I remember thinking how clean he looked, how brown and strong, and how white and even were his teeth.

"Tell us," persisted Fiammetta: "did you fight with a sword or lance, or what?"

To Fiammetta grown-up people always seemed so old that at this moment she was quite capable of believing that the Voiceful Canon had at some time or other fought amongst King Arthur's knights, that he might even be himself the "square-set man and honest" masquerading under another name.

"I fought with my fists," said the Canon, "and I do it yet — in a good cause." And as he lifted his clean-shaven, smiling face out of the steam, I felt convinced that he could not be so very old after all.

He shut the teapot lid and looked across at Fiammetta, who in her turn looked at him with a disappointed expression.

"Fists!" she repeated scornfully; "anybody can do that."

"Oh, can they?" said the Canon; "that's just what they can't. It requires a good deal of self-restraint, and self-respect, and good-

temper, and honesty, to fight properly with your fists; and on occasion it is an absolutely unanswerable argument."

"But," objected Fiammetta, leaning her elbows on the table, and leaving the Canon's very excellent cake untasted on her plate, "you could n't found a Round Table or a knighthood with your fists—you could n't hold tournaments——"

"But I do!" cried the Voiceful Canon excitedly—"I do, and I'll show you where I hold them after tea, and the weapons we fight with."

Still Fiammetta shook her head. "It's ugly," she said. "It can't be a bit like Arthur and *his* knights."

The Canon looked rather sad. "No, it's not like that," he said, "but it's as near as we can get in the circumstances. Besides," he said, suddenly brightening, "Arthur's knights could fight with their fists, too, you may be quite sure. Don't you remember how at the last, when Sir Bedivere could not bring himself to throw away the sword Excalibur, the King turns on him so angrily, and says, if he

does n't do what he's told, 'I will arise and slay thee with my hands'? And the next time Sir Bedivere did it."

"Yes, that's true," said Fiammetta dubiously. "But it does n't seem the same, somehow."

Then she ate her cake, and the Voiceful Canon told us funny stories about Bors till everybody had finished tea.

"Now show me where you hold your tournaments," commanded Fiammetta.

Up and up another curly staircase we followed the Voiceful Canon, till we came into a long bare room the full width of the house. It, too, had stone-mullioned Gothic windows; the walls were whitewashed and adorned by many photographs of groups of men in flannels, and some others who wore very little indeed, except boxing-gloves, and two big ones of specially resplendent people in velvet suits with fencing masks and foils. A couple of old football caps with tarnished gold tassels hung under one of the photographs, and all round the room on pegs hung boxing-gloves. At one end, piled against the wall, were sev-

eral big square mattresses, far bigger than for the biggest bed, and in the corners were bundles of basket-hilted single-sticks — altogether a most curious room, and the queerest thing in it was a big ball at the end of a long, flexible rod which was fixed into the ground, that looked like an enormous apple at the end of a twig.

Fiammetta looked round her with wondering eyes, and the Canon watched Fiammetta, a little wistfully, it seemed to me. Suddenly she turned to him with a radiant smile :

“I like it,” she cried ; “I understand : *I’ve* heard about you from Janey’s father. It’s the poor men you teach, and they love it — and you ?” she added softly, as with one of her quick caressing movements she caught his hand and laid her cheek upon it for an instant.

The Voiceful Canon said nothing, but he turned very red and held her hand very tight.

“Do you tell them about King Arthur and his knights ?” she asked.

The Voiceful Canon laughed.

“No,” he said ; “they would n’t under-

stand. I don't tell them much beyond the noble art of self-defence; but they know what I like, and they're jolly well sure that they've got to turn up at the Cathedral at least once on a Sunday, and most of 'em do."

"Do they like that?" asked Fiammetta curiously, who never ceased to find church-going a puzzling proceeding.

Again the Voiceful Canon laughed. "I don't ask them about that; but we can't all do what we like in this world. For instance, I'd like to keep you here for ever, but I see the carriage coming down the Close, and Squire Staniland doesn't like his horses kept waiting."

At all events, Squire Staniland's coachman didn't: and because we were not waiting under the archway for Dutton when he drove up, he straightway drove round the Close again, keeping us waiting on the pavement.

In the meantime Fiammetta found she had left her gloves in the window-seat, and the Canon went back to fetch them. It was then that she noticed a shabby-looking lad

lounging under the archway on the other side.

"That's one of the knights," she cried, and darted across the road before I could stop her. "Do you go there?" she asked him, pointing to the Canon's open door.

"Yes, miss," he mumbled civilly enough, but evidently greatly surprised at being thus abruptly accosted.

"Do you like it?"

"Rather!" And this time there was no uncertain sound in his reply.

"Can he fight?" she whispered eagerly, for she saw the Canon coming down the steps.

"Can 'e fight?" repeated the lad scornfully. "W'enever there's a row in the hisland or at the docks they fetches 'im. 'E'll go w're twenty perlice would n't never dare to. W'y, bless your 'eart, the biggest bargeman 'ave n't never winded 'im. You bet 'e can fight!"

The carriage and the Canon appearing at the same moment, Fiammetta's investigations as to the prowess of our friend were cut short. When he had packed us into the waggonette, just as we were starting, Fiammetta threw him

one of the little white cotton gloves he had restored to her.

"A gage!" she cried. "Will you wear it?"

"Rather!" cried the Canon, catching it deftly and putting it carefully into his breast-pocket. "I shall wear it always."

As we drove homeward through the green Garsetshire lanes Fiammetta was very silent, but presently she began to fidget and to show every sign of mental perturbation; at last she exclaimed:

"Oh, Janey, I've been thinking and thinking, and I *can't* imagine where he'll wear my glove when he fights. Can he pin it on to that vest thing, do you think?"

CHAPTER VI

PAUL AND HIS BOOKS

Think what a crowd whom none recall,
Unsung — unpraised — unpitied.

AUSTIN DOBSON.

A CERTAIN hostess of my acquaintance always makes a point of visiting her guests' bedrooms in their absence to inspect their night attire. She says that it throws a light upon their characters, and that she knows then what to expect of them.

Paul always managed to smuggle himself into a visitor's room on the very first evening, the moment that the said visitor had gone down to dinner, to see what books he or she had brought, and judged accordingly.

"Only a Bradshaw and a *Lady's Pictorial*," he'd say scornfully when he came out; "*she's* no good."

Paul liked people who piled up books on the little table beside the bed. For this reason Mr. Glynn was in his eyes an absolutely perfect visitor, for his portmanteau

usually contained more books than clothes. Paul looked with suspicion upon people who arrived with a great deal of baggage. One day I heard him talking to Tonks, his familiar spirit, as he stood at the one staircase window that looks out upon the yard, to watch the luggage-cart unloaded :

“Two big boxes with curly tops—all frocks and fings,” he murmured mournfully. “There might be somefing in vat yellow port-manteau, and there’s papers stuck into the rugs. We’ll go and see, Tonks, when they’ve unpacked; but I don’t think there’ll be much. It’s dull-looking luggages.”

But whether the visitor brought many books or few, Paul always read them. He was so small and thin that he could get through a door if it were left the least little bit open, and once in the bedroom he always sat down on the floor on the far side of the bed, and people would go in and out of the room, curl their hair and powder their noses, and never see him at all. And very often he did n’t see them if there was anything interesting to read, and he read so fast and greedily that

he would tear the heart out of a book while most people were considering the title-page.

Mr. Glynn was the only visitor who ever caught Paul, and it was in this way. He had gone to sit and smoke in the arbour at the bottom of the laurel walk one afternoon, when Paul appeared, accompanied by the five dogs: Thor, the deer-hound Sir William gave him: the two fox-terriers, Whisky and Soda: "Ailsa," father's collie: and Gyp, Harry's dandie, who always slept at the foot of his bed. Paul was never to be seen without a crowd of dogs about his feet and a book of some sort under his arm. He had his "Norse Tales" with him now, but he was n't reading: he was stumping up and down saying the same verse of poetry over and over again. It was this:

"The ladies of St. James's
Go swinging to the play;
Their footmen run before them,
With a 'Stand by! Clear the way!'
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
She takes her buckled shoon,
When we go out a-courting
Beneath the harvest moon."

Up and down went Paul: he always walked till he came to the Phyllida bit, then stood still with all the dogs around him, panting and hanging their tongues out and looking as pleased as possible; and when Mr. Glynn suddenly appeared in the entrance to the arbour, Paul took no notice of him, but finished his verse.

"Where did you learn that, Paul?" asked Mr. Glynn.

"I did n't learn it," said Paul: "I read it."

"But where?"

Paul put his hand on Thor's collar to gain his moral support, and replied with another question:

"Do you mind folks reading your books?"

"Not in the least; that's what they're for."

"Well, I'll tell you, it was in a green book about a lyre: on the table beside your bed. I like it; it sort of runs and lurches like the men at the docks when they're carrying something heavy, four of them together."

"So it does," Mr. Glynn agreed; "I like it, too, immensely. Did you read any more?"

"Oh yes; but I had n't much time last

night, because nurse was prowling about and might have missed me. I always have clean hands to read people's books, I truly do. I wash them in the basin in the water they've just left before I touch one book."

"That accounts for the towel," said Mr. Glynn thoughtfully.

"You are n't angry, are you?" Paul asked anxiously; "I would n't have told you else!"

Mr. Glynn laughed. "Of course I'm not angry: I'm rather interested. I'll give you that book, Paul. I'm glad you told me. I'll take care there's always a nice selection. Did you read any of the others?"

"I shall read them all if you stop long enough — *do* stop."

"I'll do my best, but I'm — glad — to know," said Mr. Glynn, blowing beautiful rings of smoke between his words; and then he strolled down the laurel path and into the house.

"He said he was n't angry," Paul remarked that evening, "but he's tooked some of them away all the same."

But Mr. Glynn never told of Paul, and gave him the book he coveted for his own.

Paul's passionate love of books was a puzzle to the rest of us, and father always said that he must be a throwback to a bachelor uncle of his own who lived at Oxford. Father remembered being taken to his house when he was a very little boy, and even then it struck him as a most curious abode, for every scrap of wall space was utilised for loaded bookshelves, hall and staircase and landings sharing a like fate. This uncle left his library to the college of which he was a Fellow, and mother never ceases to regret that he died before she married father, for she thinks he might have left some of his books to her. She, too, liked books in a sensible, discriminating way; but Paul's fondness amounted to mania. Anything, everything, between two boards appealed to him because it was a book, and the shabbier and older it looked, the better he liked it.

"Poor dears! they must want to get out so," he said of some little, fat, calf-bound

books he found on a forgotten shelf in one of the attics; "it must be so sad to be a book that nobody reads."

Paul rather suspected books in gay bindings, though, of course, he always read all that came in his way. Most of the books in our house were collected into the morning-room — mother's room we called it. There were three quite large bookcases, one with glass doors which contained long rows of books in similar binding, dignified by the name of "the editions."

Most of us in youth deemed "the editions" to be a large family of writers, each member thereof having all his books bound in a certain way to distinguish them from those of his brothers and sisters. The bookcase containing their works was locked, it is true, but the key was always left in the lock.

No one ever knew Paul had tampered with them at all till one night he began to scream in his sleep — the most dreadful heartrending screams. He woke Harry, he woke Fiammetta and me, and even nurse, who slept quite a long way off with Lucy in the old

night nursery. We all crowded into the boys' room, to find mother already there with a lighted candle in her hand. She put it on the table, and, sitting down on Paul's bed, had him in her arms in a minute. He stopped screaming, but sobbed out a long story about "a dreadful face — she looked in the glass — a dreadful purple face — and she tore the veil right in two — she *tore* it! Oh! is she gone? Send her away — oh, send her away!"

Mother stood up with Paul in her arms, looking very tall in her long white nightdress, with all her beautiful hair over her shoulders, and as she carried her little son away, she said, very quietly:

"Get back to bed everybody; he has been dreaming. He'll be all right now with me: he has been reading again."

When mother had gone, and we were all back in our quiet beds once more, and I thought of her walking down the long corridor with Paul in her arms, I remembered how once, long ago, when Miss Goodlake was asking what she called "useful questions," she had asked Paul "What is a mother?" and he

instantly replied, "A person that carries you comfortabler than anyone else."

Next morning the cause of Paul's perturbation came out. It seemed that mother was very well up in "the editions," and knew in a moment which of them Paul had been reading. That he had no sort of business to read *any* of them seemed beside the mark, somehow. It was useless to expect Paul *not* to read things. Mother came up into the school-room directly after prayers, sat down in the window-seat, and called Paul to her. He looked rather pale and dark under the eyes, but was otherwise in a cheerful and self-satisfied mood, for, like Fiammetta, he dearly loved to make a sensation.

All breakfast-time he had expatiated on the tremendous adventures of the young lady called Jane, who lived, so he told us, "on the third shelf, right-hand corner bookcase near the door." (He always described people as "living" in that bookcase.) "It's a most direful book," he was just saying as mother came in; "it was that made me so 'fraid last night. It was awfully nice going to sleep

with mother, though. First she cuddled me in bed till I was happy again, then she wrapped me in shawls on her sofa, and I slept like anything."

"Paul," said mother, "come here."

Paul went over to the window and stood beside her, smiling the self-conscious, confident smile of a cherished invalid.

"Paul," mother said again, "you must promise me not to read any more of my books without permission."

Paul turned very red. "It's no use my promising," he said, shaking his head mournfully, "not one bit. I shouldn't keep it. Whenever I went into vat room and saw all the dear darling books beckoning, I should go to them—I know I should. Books is n't meant to sit on shelves all by themselves."

Mother and he looked at each other for a minute in silence, then she said, sighing: "Then, Paul, I must lock up the bookcases."

"But two of them haven't no doors," he objected.

Mother got up suddenly and looked out of the window. A promise was a most sacred

thing in our family, and she never let us promise anybody anything unless we were absolutely sure we could do it. If she herself as much as said, "Well, I'll see what I can do," that thing was as good as done, and we knew it.

Paul stood watching mother's back with anxious eyes. Nearly all the books in the house were in that room, and he couldn't depend much on visitors. Very few were like Mr. Glynn.

Presently mother turned to him again, saying: "You must see, Paul, that I can't possibly allow you to be frightened, and have all the others disturbed because you read things that give you mental indigestion. It's bad for you and it's bad for them. Why can't you read your own books, suitable books, that are here in the schoolroom — there are plenty of them?" And mother waved her hand towards the schoolroom bookcase, with its cheerful rows of gaily-backed volumes.

Paul just glanced in their direction. "I've read them all," he sighed, "lots of times. Some of 'em's stupid, some of 'em's not.

But, mother, because I've had an egg for breakfast this morning, you wouldn't say, 'Dear little Paul, you must have an egg tomorrow, and Thursday, and Friday, and all the days,' would you? It's just like that with books. Some's like eggs that you like pretty often, but some's like rice-pudding that you never want to see any more. I'm hungrier for books than most people—lots of books, different sorts. I don't suppose I can help it, can I?"

"I don't suppose you can," said mother thoughtfully, "but you must do what you are told."

"I do," said Paul, "when they remember to tell me."

"Can't *you* remember to ask me what you may read?"

"No, mother," said Paul with immense decision; "I could never remember such a lot of things as that."

Mother rose, and, stooping down, kissed Paul on both cheeks; she went out of the room without saying anything more.

The moment lessons were over Paul rushed

downstairs and into the morning-room, and I followed to see what he would do.

The books had all been altered. "The editions" no longer sat tidily like families in a pew at church. They were jumbled up anyhow with lots of other books. The bookcase with the glass doors was locked, and the key gone.

Paul looked round the well-filled open shelves, and gave a sigh of relief. Then he went and stood opposite the locked bookcase with his hands in his pockets and his legs far apart, and grinned, presently breaking into a series of delighted giggles as he ran his eyes along the shelves.

"Jane's in there!" he chuckled; "I'm glad I finished her yesterday. I've read nearly all in there," he concluded, "but there's an awful lot left out I have n't had time to yet — so *that's* all right."

CHAPTER VII

THE SCHOOL-TREAT

Now, Lady Emma at the Grange
A School Feast has at heart,
And very kindly does arrange
That we shall all take part.

MRS. ARTHUR JACOB.

EVERY year father gave the school-treat in the big hayfield, only separated from the garden by a sunk fence. The children had tea in a tent that came from Garchester, but mother gave tea to all the mothers in the dining-room. Nurse presided, and it was exactly the same sort of tea that people had at a tennis-party, only it was indoors. But the mothers liked that: they liked the pretty china and the silver, and, best of all, they liked the savoury sandwiches and the thin rolled bread-and-butter. They crooked their little fingers elegantly as they drank, and nudged one another to remark upon the quantity of butter that must go to so many thin slices of bread; and as to the many-coloured

sugar-covered cakes, one good lady was heard to wish she might "kip un under a glass ceäse, a' be that beeoutivul." The gardener's wife was regarded with much commiseration when, holding up one of the Apostle spoons, she explained that "'er mother 'ad one of they, but some'ow it got put through the mangle, an' the little man on top came out as flat as flat."

The Voiceful Canon came, Canon Sir John came, and Sergeant came. He and the Voiceful Canon organised sports for the boys, while mother and Miss Goodlake and the vicarage people managed the girls, Fiammetta assisting this year at the first school-treat she had ever seen.

Paul was in great form on these occasions; he stuck his hands deep into his pockets, stood with his legs far apart, and conversed solemnly with two or three old gaffers, who, past work, sat in the shade and admired the sports of the rest. On these occasions Paul spoke in the broadest vernacular, but so did father when he talked to his men. I don't think he knew it, but he did; and in order to talk Garset-

shire with absolutely perfect intonation you must screw up your face to one side, punctuate your sentences with sapient nods, and express approval of your companion's remarks with many such phrases as, "Ah, so a' be," "Ah, so a' do, sure-ly."

"How well Paul speaks the *patois*," Fiammetta had said upon one occasion; and Paul, delighted by an appreciation of a gift which was neither admired nor encouraged by the authorities, offered to teach her there and then.

But Fiammetta was not an apt pupil, and when she could not succeed in achieving the Garsetshire vowels or in screwing her face sufficiently to one side to please Paul, she declared it to be an ugly *patois*, and left it alone.

There were not only the village children at our school-treat. Every summer there came "from far London" for a fortnight, some half-dozen pale-faced mites whom we called the "Little Queries," because they always looked so surprised and questioning all the time. They were boarded in different families in the village, and were generally well behaved

and docile all the time. They were selected and sent for the holiday by a settlement of ladies in the East End.

Only on one occasion was there any trouble, when a girl set fire to one of father's ricks. Some people said it was hysteria; but we had a different name for it in our part of the world, and afterwards it "transpired" that the fortunes of the damsel in question had already, like those of Sir Robert Walpole in the *Encyclopædia*, "suffered a temporary eclipse" in a reformatory. On the whole, however, the Queries were a great success, and at the school-treat took their pleasure with a zest and abandon never achieved by the stolid village children.

Fiammetta had been prepared to take them under her wing and generally pioneer and shepherd them throughout the afternoon. The moment, however, that the races began, and the Voiceful Canon and Sergeant rushed about the field ringing bells and roaring at the children to get into their places, the Queries melted away from her side; for competition of any kind was a thing they

thoroughly understood, and in short races they had it all their own way.

But to the village children the family at the Court was always of absorbing interest, and Fiammetta's general "curousness" had been bruited abroad by Dorcas, whose people lived in the village, so that Fiammetta was not long without an admiring court about her — two small sisters of Dorcas, Mary Jane and Rose Mustoe, Tommy Copner, the village scapegrace, and Ebenezer and Samuel Heaven (such a lot of people in our village are called Heaven!). Everyone else had gone to watch or run in the races.

"What shall we do?" asked Fiammetta, rather embarrassed by the little crowd that squeezed round her. "They're very nice, these peasants," she said afterwards, "but they're always so hot."

The group stared at her open-mouthed, but volunteered no suggestion.

Now, just at this moment Fiammetta turned her head, and happened to catch sight of a thin column of smoke rising from a corner of the distant kitchen-garden.

"Come," she said, "with me. The gardener has made a bonfire; we'll go and see it."

Off they all trotted, unnoticed in the general hubbub, but joined on the way by Paul, who had tired of the gaffers and was seeking fresh opportunities of conversing in broadest Garsetshire.

"Us didn't ought to go into Squoire's garden, I don't think," hazarded Mary Jane, who was "wul brought up."

"Oh yes, you can, with *us*," said Fiammetta magnificently; "you're our visitors, and we must amuse you."

The children nudged one another, and felt very important.

By the time they reached the garden a light breeze had sprung up, and the heap of rubbish in the far corner of a bed of carrots was burning gaily.

"Ah," said Fiammetta, "it's just as I hoped — not quite in the corner; we can get right round it."

"But what do you want to go round it for?" asked Paul; "it looks just the same."

"Wait," said Fiammetta solemnly. "I've thought of a quite new play."

Paul waited, so did the others, while Fiammetta, with knit brows and serious countenance, stalked forward and poked the bonfire together gingerly with a pea-stick she had pulled up for the purpose.

"Listen," she said suddenly; "we'll have a miracle-play."

No one spoke except Paul, who again voiced the thoughts of the community by asking: "What's that?"

"Oh, a play out of the Bible, where things happen, you know. Listen; we'll do Elijah and the prophets of Baal. They all know about Elijah, for they've been doing him for Sundays and Sundays in school. Miss Goodlake told me. You know all about Elijah, don't you?" she asked, turning suddenly to her amazed and gasping audience. "The prophet, you know."

"I've 'eared on 'im," said Tommy Copner cautiously, as one unwilling to admit too great an intimacy with Elijah till he should know what was expected of him.

“Am I to be Elijah?” asked Paul, who never expected long-winded explanations where any pretending was toward.

“Oh no,” said Fiammetta with great decision. “*I’m* to be Elijah, and you and the rest have got to be the prophets of Baal, *you* know.” Then in a persuasive voice: “You’ve *all* the shouting and dancing round the bon-fire, and the cutting with knives” — here Tommy Copner felt furtively in his pocket — “you’ve really much the best of it; I only come in quite at the end. No, *don’t* poke the fire! I want it to smoulder till quite the last. Do show them what to do, Paul — *you* know.”

Paul thought a moment. “I’d rather like to be Elijah,” he said regretfully. “He *was* a man, you know; but if you’re very anxious you may be him, but you must let us call on Baal for a good long time, won’t you?”

“Oh, for ages!” said Fiammetta magnanimously; “the fire is n’t nearly ready yet.”

“Be us to ’oller?” asked Tommy with interest.

"Ah, you 'oller same as me!" cried Paul cheerfully, and holding out a grubby hand to Ebenezer and Tommy. They, together with Rose and Mary Jane, formed themselves into a ring round the fire.

"Dorcas did say as she were a hold-fashioned piece," whispered Mary Jane to Rose. "What *do* she want us to do?"

Paul began to dance round the fire, and slowly but surely the others warmed to their work, and the "hollerin'" began in good earnest. And Fiammetta, who at first had stood loftily aside, hurling sarcasms at the prophets of Baal, decided that it was possible to be a "Baalite," as Paul called it, first, and then Elijah, so she, too, joined the dance and shouted for Baal with the rest of them.

"Now for the knives!" cried Paul, brandishing a new pen-knife. Only Tommy Copner followed suit, which, perhaps, was as well. Then the dancing round and the yells for Baal began afresh. Now, whether the children acted as bellows to the smouldering fire, or whether it had suddenly reached some dried sticks, will never be known, but something

caused the bonfire to burst out suddenly into quite large flames, and Mary Jane's white muslin frock caught alight.

With a wild scream she darted away among the carrots, while the others, all but Fiammetta, stood perfectly still, transfixed with horror.

Fiammetta tore after her, screaming, "Throw yourself down! roll on the ground!" but Mary Jane was crazy with terror, and ran on. Fiammetta, however, could run faster, and, jumping upon her back, brought the little pillar of flame to the ground, and rolled over and over with her on the damp earth. Fiammetta's dress, like all her dresses, was of some soft blue woollen stuff that did not catch fire easily, and in three minutes a sobbing, singed, and sadly frightened Mary Jane was sitting among the feathery carrots, while the others crowded round to discover the extent of the damage. Her dress was utterly spoilt, but she herself very little hurt. Fiammetta's hands were burnt and her frock scorched, but otherwise there was no very serious damage done.

"I can't never go to tea like this 'ere,"

sobbed Mary Jane, "an' it be all 'er fault, she be that mishtiful. Dorcas did say so."

Fiammetta, too, began to cry. "I'm very sorry," she sobbed. "I'll give you one of my frocks to make up. I did n't intend any flame to come till I poked it at the end, when I said the 'Lord God of Israel, Isaac, and Jacob' bit, and then you would have fallen on your faces all quite properly."

"I did vall on my feace, any'ow," sobbed Mary Jane. "I don't know what mother'll say, nor Squoire neither, though Master Paul be just as much to blame as we."

"What's that about Squire?" said a voice; and father's head appeared over the wall, followed by that of the Voiceful Canon.

"Whatever is the matter with the child?" cried father, peering over the wall. He had climbed up on to a projecting stone, and was somewhat unsteady. "What are you sitting in among those wet carrots for, and what on earth was all that awful row about?"

No one spoke for a moment, till Tommy Copner stepped forward, and, pulling his front lock, said solemnly:

"'T were them prophets, sir, a-'ollerin' ; and Mary Jane she caught on fire, and Elijah 'e put 'er out ; an' then they both sits there a-'ollerin'."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated father, and disappeared from view.

But the Voiceful Canon swung himself up to the top of the wall and surveyed us.

"And where has Elijah gone?" he inquired.

"Up in a fiery chariot," cried Paul, suddenly finding his voice — "at least, she nearly did."

"*She?*" repeated the Voiceful Canon in absolute bewilderment.

"Fiammetta, you know. *She* was Elijah."

"Oh!" said the Voiceful Canon, giving a low whistle of comprehension. "*I* see."

"She put the Baalite out, anyway," continued Paul. "She rolled on her like they tell you to in the 'Mergency Book.'"

The Voiceful Canon dropped off the wall to the ground — he had to be careful, for our walls are all made of loose stones — and came over across the carrots to where Fiammetta and Mary Jane sat weeping together.

"But what set fire to you?" he asked, as he, too, sat down among the wet carrots.

"The fire from heaven," sobbed Fiammetta. "It came too quick, before I'd asked for it."

"'T were the burnin' cooch, zir, as bleazed up," explained Thomas Copner indulgently. "We was a-hacting a miracl'y-play."

The Voiceful Canon tried hard to look solemn as he implored the distressed damsels to arise and go to the house to get washed and anointed and reassured generally. He finally departed with them, having given an arm to each, and it is my belief that he redressed them himself, for there were no servants in the house, and yet they appeared quite smiling at tea-time, and Mary Jane was wearing one of *my* frocks. Fiammetta's had been pronounced unsuitable. I wonder why?

"You see," said Fiammetta that night, as she sat on her bed, with her long arms clasped round her knees, "the fire came for the wrong prophets, which was tiresome. My hands are so sore; but I don't mind, for

there's a friend of daddie's in London who's always talking about 'elevating the masses,' so I thought I'd try and act a high subject for them. I daresay it did those children good."

CHAPTER VIII

FIAMMETTA GOES A-FISHING

Other joys are but toys.

IZAAK WALTON.

SUDDENLY, right in the middle of the summer term, just before haymaking, father took it into his head to give Harry a holiday, and carried him off to Wales for five days' trout-fishing. Father was a keen fisherman, and he was proud of Harry, who could throw a fly very prettily for his age.

"What's the good of waiting till August?" said father. "The trout are n't half so lively then. It's his last chance before he goes to school."

So mother, who was always glad if father would go away for a few days on any pretext whatsoever — he was such a stay-at-home man — let Harry go, and they had a grand time.

The result was that Harry came back to "talk fishing" from morning till night. He

kept the "Angler's Diary" and "Cholmondeley Pennell" on the table by his bed; Hardy Brothers' price-list was never out of his hands; the *Fishing Gazette* was always carried off to the schoolroom the very instant father had done with it, and as, of all enthusiasms, an enthusiasm for any form of sport is the most catching, we were all infected — Fiammetta most of all, for she ran after every new thing with the ardour of the Athenians. Moreover, her father was just then salmon-fishing in Norway, which added to the entrancing interest of the subject.

Not that there was any trout or salmon-fishing in our neighbourhood; water there was in plenty, but only bottom-fishing, and for that just then we felt nothing but scorn. Still, the lack of trout was not allowed to stand in our way. You can fish out of a window with a walking-stick and a piece of string, and have excellent sport, too, if only you have sufficient imagination. Fiammetta did it for hours at a time, chanting the while a melancholy ditty in Italian, with a refrain that sounded like "O pescator di su l'Ave

Maria," which was equally depressing and impressive. Harry was most scornful, but all the same could not resist the temptation of taking Paul down to the pond and showing him how to throw a fly, which knowledge Paul immediately passed on to us, together with a borrowed rod, and Harry was exceedingly cross because we entangled his cast. However, Harry was out of the way most of the time, as he had to do extra lessons at the vicarage to make up for his holiday.

About three days after he came back, when the fishing mania was at its height, the rain came down in torrents, and it was, for us, a half-holiday. Harry went back to the vicarage directly after lunch, as the vicar said he would take him that afternoon and let him have the first fine one instead. All lunch-time he kept groaning and exclaiming, "What a day it would have been for the Artro! Why, they'd have taken worm the minute it touched the water! What a glorious day it would have been, with the water as brown as brown! Oh, *blow!*" and, muttering and grumbling as he went, Harry

struggled into a mackintosh, leaving Paul, Fiammetta, and me at the open schoolroom window to watch him jump the puddles as he dashed down the drive to the vicarage.

Father and mother were lunching in Garchester; Miss Goodlake had gone to her room to write letters; Lucy and nurse and Dorcas were shut up in the nursery, and the house was very quiet.

"I'll tell you what," Fiammetta exclaimed suddenly, "we'll go and fish from the loft steps under that porch thing at the top; it's covered, so we shan't get very wet, and if we go quietly no one will see us."

"And we'll take father's rods," said Paul cheerfully; "he would n't be half as cross as Harry even if we did get the line a bit mixed."

"One rod will be enough," said Fiammetta, as usual making up everybody's mind; "we can take it in turns."

"We'll bait it with worm because it's so wet," said Paul. "That yard's a perfect swamp; who knows but what a fish *might* come there somehow?"

Paul and Fiammetta were always expecting quite impossible things to happen; they had a way of saying "I don't see why it shouldn't" which quite crushed any feeble glimmerings of common-sense in me, and as the fishing game was new and very attractive, I fear I made no effort to dissuade them.

Softly, one by one, we crept down the stairs to the gunroom, selected a rather bulky-looking gray canvas case from the rack, and escaped by the ever-open back-door without having attracted the notice of anyone.

Fiammetta carried the rod, Paul a tin box of bait and a fishing-bag slung gracefully over his shoulders, where, however, it declined to remain, as the strap was so long — he fell over it three times as we went — and I was armed with a large and heavy landing-net. Once outside, we ran, and as the rain came down as though the heavens purposed a second deluge, we got thoroughly wet before we reached the stackyard where the cowsheds were. But that did not matter; as Fiammetta remarked, "We ought *really* to be up to our waists in water."

The steps up to the loft had a rail on the outside, and at the top a good large covered platform, also railed in. It was a favourite spot with Fiammetta, who always wanted to act Juliet and lean over the balcony, while Harry, or Paul, or Claude from the vicarage — who was prosaic in the extreme, but very obliging — stood below to be struck dumb with amazement at the lovely vision overhead.

They certainly were dumb, those Romeos, for by no amount of instruction and exhortation could they be induced to come in at the right moment with “What light from yonder window breaks?” As for Claude, he would stand with his hands in his pockets and the most unloverlike grin on his face, till upon one occasion Juliet became so “exasperated” that she took off her shoe and threw it at him, hitting him on the nose.

To-day, however, there was no question of romance. Fiammetta might have been Dame Juliana Berners herself, so keen and determined was she. It took a long time to set up the rod, and we should never have managed

the reel and line but for Paul, who had profited by his lessons from Harry.

When all was in order, and a disgusting-looking pink worm was writhing on the hook (Fiammetta hid her eyes while it was being impaled, but lent Paul her handkerchief directly after to wipe his fingers), she leaned over the railing and proceeded to cast in a most business-like manner into the slush beneath. There was quite a big pool in the middle of the yard, and into the midst of this Fiammetta managed to throw her worm, for the rod was father's best split-cane, and very long. We talked in whispers, lest we should disturb the fish. A whole quarter of an hour went by, and nothing happened, when suddenly a white duck came waddling in from the stable-yard. Fiammetta gave the rod a whisk, and the worm lay on the ground wriggling not three yards from the duck. The reel went "whirr," the duck gave a loud quack, and, half running, half flying, made across that yard in the utmost terror and consternation.

"Hold him up! Let him go! Follow

him!" cried Paul in the greatest excitement, as we all three tumbled down the steps into the yard.

I grasped the landing-net, Fiammetta hung on to the heavy trout rod, which bent almost to snapping under the strain, while that unhappy duck, with "squawks" that got hoarser and weaker as the moments passed, went flapping and tumbling all over the yard.

"Can't you land him?" gasped Paul. "Wind him in a bit. Give me the landing-net, Janey. . . ."

Fiammetta flung the rod from her with a sudden shriek.

"Oh, *poor* duck!" she sobbed, "how we must be hurting it! Why, the hook is in its throat! What shall we do? Oh, catch the duck, and find somebody to take it out! Oh, poor, poor duck!" And Fiammetta ran distractedly to and fro, wringing her hands and sobbing, while the rain washed the tears from her cheeks.

Away went Paul with the landing-net, making futile plunges at the duck, which doubled back into the stackyard, winding the

line round Paul's feet as it ran. I had just picked up the rod, and was wagging it helplessly, when Paul and the landing-net went charging into father, who suddenly appeared in the archway leading to the stable-yard.

"What on earth——" exclaimed father, and stopped, for the duck came to a flopping standstill just at his feet.

Father made a grab at the duck, opened its beak, did something with a sort of jerk, and threw it from him, when it waddled gaily away, quacking hoarsely.

Then he turned to us. Fiammetta had repossessed herself of the rod, and was winding in the line rather hastily.

"*I caught it,*" she said proudly. "*It must have weighed forty pounds, the rod bent so. I should have landed it, too, only I remembered how it must hurt the duck, poor thing! I'm always humane to animals.*"

"You give me that rod!" cried father, almost snatching it out of her hands. "I would n't have that rod hurt for twenty pounds. Ducks indeed!" And father backed under the archway out of the wet to take

the precious rod to pieces there and then. "You've made a confounded mess of the line," he said in a minute, "but upon my soul you've done no damage. Go in out of the wet, quick!" and, stepping out of the archway, father drove us before him towards the house.

Fiammetta's blue dress was almost black, it was so wet. Paul's smock hung upon him like classic draperies. We were all covered with mud from head to foot.

In an all-too-short ten minutes the three of us were in bed, while nurse, Miss Goodlake, and Dorcas each stood over one unhappy child with a huge scalding-hot glass of milk.

No child was ever allowed to have a cold during nurse's reign. Her methods were arbitrary and unpleasant, but perfectly successful, and no one dreamt of interfering with her.

"I'll 'ave none of yer snufflin', sneegin' children 'ere," she would remark scornfully. "It's all mismanagement and fool'ardy nonsense, that's what it is. Them guvnesses is no use. The minit I turns my back, off them childring goes a-fishing for poor innercent

poultry as never did no one any 'arm. I never *did* 'ear such goings-on."

We were not allowed to get up again that day. Tears, prayers, and protestations were of no avail. Wet feet were bad enough, but to get wet through was absolutely unpardonable.

Father crept up to see us during the evening, stepping with an elaborate softness that made every board creak under his sixteen stone. He was dreadfully afraid of nurse, and looked as though he had stolen the crystallized fruits he brought us for our comfort.

Fiammetta sat up, demanding sternly: "Are we in bed for the rod, or for getting wet, or for hurting the duck — which is it?"

"Perhaps it's for the lot," said father, sitting down on the end of her bed; "and you know you had no business to take that rod, if it was you that took it."

"We all took it," I interposed.

"Oh yes, we all took it," Fiammetta went on, "and I'm sorry — very sorry, 'specially about the duck and going to bed; it's so dull. I suppose that poor duck will have a sore

throat for a long time." And Fiammetta, blissfully unconscious that Dutton had wrung the poor thing's neck an hour ago, shook her curly head solemnly; then she brightened. "But you can't think of all these things at the time, can you? not when you feel the first tug."

And father, quite forgetting that he had come to moralise, slapped his leg joyously, exclaiming:

"Bless you! there's nothing like it — nothing like it in the world. But it does n't do to be too eager; never strike too soon, and" — with a sudden recollection of the muddy rod — "never, *never* drop your rod for anything."

Fiammetta stared hard at him for a minute, then she said severely:

"I don't believe you are the least little bit sorry for that duck, really."

CHAPTER IX

PHILANTHROPY

Then let us, gentle Alice said, to Goody Burgon go,
And take her tea and sugar, and some flour to make some
dough.

We must remember others who are less well off than we,
And the poor are always grateful for some Lipton's one-
and-three.

X. Y. Z.

IT was Sunday, and Paul was in an aggraving mood because he had spent all his pocket-money. Such a state of things was not unusual, but on this particular Sunday he felt it, and for this reason: The Voiceful Canon had been to our church to preach in aid of some East-End mission. Now, the Voiceful Canon never preached quite like anybody else. In the first place, he never spoke for more than twelve minutes, and he told things—real things—that people had done for one another. The people he told us about never said beautiful things, as they do in

stories; I do not even think one of them died, but, as Harry said afterwards, it "made you feel beastly to be so comfortable."

After the sermon father and Dutton and the Vicar's gardener went round with the wooden plates for the collection. Father came to our pew, and as the plate came back from mother's end, Fiammetta, who had been fumbling at the back of her neck, laid her string of pearls upon it—the pearls she always wore under her frock to keep their colour good. But father took them out of the plate and put them in his breast-pocket, and gave them back to her at lunch, saying:

"You mustn't give these away without your father's leave, little blue maid."

Fiammetta was very disappointed, for she had just been telling us how, long ago in Florence, all the ladies had given their jewels at the bidding of one Savonarola, and that she felt "just like a Florentine lady." She even appealed to the Voiceful Canon, who was lunching with us, but he upheld father's decision, and himself clasped the pearls round her neck again.

Hence it was that, sitting under the elms on the lawn after lunch, we all felt rather flat and disappointed, and came to the conclusion that it is hard to be charitable in one's youth: there are so many restrictions. Miss Goodlake, who was hoarse, and had therefore not gone as usual to teach in the Sunday-school, was lying on a deck-chair wrapped in a shawl reading "Donovan." She was always reading either "Donovan" or "We Two," and I verily believe went through life upheld by the hope of meeting an interesting young Atheist whom she might "influence." All who came to our house, however, were hopelessly orthodox, or else did not talk about their "views," so except occasionally with Paul her powers had no scope.

"I shall take all the rest of my money this evening," said Fiammetta, looking at Paul, who had no money, and who was not allowed to attend evening church because of his youth, it being the one restriction on this score that he did not actively resent.

"It's easy enough to give money — if you've got it," the impecunious one remarked

scornfully. "It's yourself you ought to give — he said so."

"I don't see how you're to give yourself, if people won't even let you give things that belong to you." And Fiammetta's hand stole up to her slim throat to feel for the necklace under her frock.

Paul grunted; he was longing to pick a quarrel with somebody, and so far no one had given him an opportunity. He concluded his grunt with words to the effect that some people were always pretending, which, to say the least of it, came with ill grace from him.

In a moment a sharp slap recalled to him the fact that his was not the only wounded spirit in the community, and before any of us could interfere he had retaliated, while Fiammetta, in her turn, defended herself by means of a complicated kind of smack that left four long scratches on Paul's cheek. Miss Goodlake dropped "Donovan," and hastened to the rescue. She scolded Paul, and she appealed to Fiammetta's "better nature." Harry and I sat gloomily aloof. It seemed such waste of a fine Sunday afternoon.

“How could you, Fiammetta? How *could* you scratch him?” Miss Goodlake concluded, holding one of Fiammetta’s hands, and gazing into her face with almost tearful earnestness.

Fiammetta rubbed her nose with the other, and seemed to consider for a minute, then said solemnly:

“You see, it was like this: You know Pussy — how soft her paws seem; you can’t even hear her coming. Yet, if she’s angry, her claws shoot out and she scratches ever so. Well, I suppose my nails must have shot out just like that.”

“Do let me see you do it, Fee!” exclaimed Paul eagerly, quite forgetting his lacerated face and feelings in the interest of so surprising a phenomenon.

But Fiammetta did not forget the Voiceful Canon’s sermon, and a desire to be actively altruistic and philanthropic consumed her.

“Will you let me go and see some of the poor people for you?” she begged mother so continuously that at last she consented, and said that Fiammetta and I might take a bas-

ket of groceries to old Mrs. Crudge, who lived in a cottage right away at the end of father's furthest field.

You could walk for nearly three miles on father's land, and her cottage was quite two miles from the house. Mother said we must walk there and carry the basket, and that we must go by ourselves. No Miss Goodlake, no nurse, no Dorcas; we were to go by the cart-road leading past the home farm. I rather wondered why mother had selected Mrs. Crudge as the recipient of Fiammetta's benefactions, as, from my recollection of her, she was rather cross; but she was undoubtedly very poor, and so old that even her grandchildren were out in service, and she lived all by herself.

We started off directly we had finished our afternoon lessons, about half-past three, bearing the basket between us. Paul and Lucy were going for a drive in the pony-cart with Miss Goodlake. It was a very hot afternoon, and the cart-road was rutty and not very interesting. The basket grew heavier and heavier. We carried it by turns, we carried it together,

we laid it down and sat one on each side of it, till wasps came to sit upon us and drive us on again; we bumped it into one another, and the contents rattled ominously. There seemed to be things in pots as well as the usual blue-paper packets. That basket grew to be a dreadful burden before we were half-way.

When at last we reached Mrs. Crudge's cottage we were both quite worn out. Only the picture we had conjured up of her rapturous gratitude sustained us. As we rested the basket on the step, preparatory to making ourselves known, Fiammetta gasped out:

"Now, this, Janey, is real charity. We are giving *ourselves*, like he said."

I nodded breathlessly, and Fiammetta lifted her little brown hand and hammered on the door, which, like all the cottage doors in our part of the world, stood ajar.

There was no voice nor anyone that answered.

"You knock, Janey; perhaps she's asleep," whispered Fiammetta, with more than a reminiscence of Elijah in her tone.

I thumped loudly, and in my efforts fell

over the basket against the door, which of course yielded, so that I made an unceremonious entrance into Mrs. Crudge's kitchen on all-fours.

As Fiammetta had surmised, that lady was asleep in an armchair beside the empty fireplace. The room was very bare, very clean, and very hot; for, of course, the pretty little window, framed in honeysuckle, with geraniums in pots on the ledge inside, was shut.

Mrs. Crudge looked rather nice asleep. Her dress was as neat as her kitchen, and her brown, withered face peaceful and dignified.

"Shall we put the basket down and go away?" I whispered.

Fiammetta regarded me scornfully. "Would that be giving *yourself*? We must talk to her and cheer her."

"Perhaps she 'd rather sleep," I said humbly, feeling absolutely certain that nothing *I* could say would have in the smallest degree an exhilarating effect upon Mrs. Crudge.

But Fiammetta had not walked two miles lugging a heavy basket to go away again

without having, as it were, sampled the object of her bounty. She advanced boldly to the somnolent figure in the armchair, and shook her by the arm, exclaiming loudly:

“Here we are; we’ve come!”

Mrs. Crudge woke with a start, exclaiming in a voice that could not by any possibility be construed as delighted:

“Who be you a-shakin’, you young varmint? You get out of this kitchen smartish — you ——”

Mrs. Crudge stopped suddenly, for she had just noticed me. Fiammetta, astonished and dismayed at this unusual form of address, was hastening towards the door when *she* fell over the basket and upset it, so that the contents rolled about the floor.

Mrs. Crudge grasped the arms of her chair, demanding indignantly:

“Wot hever *har* you a-doin’? I never see sich antics. A-wakin’ of folks up an’ a-up-settin’ and makin’ such a paladum. You ’elp pick them things up, Miss Jane, or I’ll tell your ma of you; don’t stand starin’ there like a stucky image.”

I flew to assist Fiammetta, and tremblingly we placed the parcels and two basins on the dresser, while Mrs. Crudge, who did n't look nearly so nice now that she was awake, hurled directions at us, accompanying the same with somewhat scornful criticism of our offerings, such as: "Is that drippin' in them basins? Cook 'ave n't left no gravy underneath, I don't suppose. Now, wot hever's the good of a packet of carnflour for the likes of me? 'Ooper 'e don't leave me enough milk to go makin' harreroot. There, there, that'll do. Law bless me! 'ow akard you du be, to be sure."

At last we had arranged everything, if not to her satisfaction, at least tolerably, and, as she paused for breath, Fiammetta turned to her with one of her radiant smiles, saying graciously:

"We brought the things ourselves because we were so anxious to see you. I hope you are pretty well."

"Be you the little maid as did set Mary Jane Mustoe afire?" Mrs. Crudge demanded abruptly.

Fiammetta blushed. "I did n't exactly," she began, but Mrs. Crudge interrupted sternly:

"I've 'eerd of your goin's-on. You do come from furrin parts, don't ee? and be that mishtiful. Ah, I don't 'old with sich onchristian doin's, that I don't!"

Fiammetta stared at her indignantly, while Mrs. Crudge stared back again with two hard, unblinking little black eyes. The slim blue figure leaning against the dresser drew itself up, and for a moment I trembled as to what was going to happen next. Fiammetta was quite unused to this sort of reception, and, having come prepared to give, found herself constrained to accept an attitude of adverse criticism as unfamiliar as it was unpleasant.

As usual, when Fiammetta was present, Mrs. Crudge ignored me. She was wide awake now, and rather curious as to the reason of our coming.

"'Oo sent you?" she demanded. "'T warn't Squoire, now, nor 'is good lady. What hever did you come for?"

"We came," Fiammetta said slowly, "be-

cause we wanted to come, and because we thought it might please you — but ——”

“I’m glad I’ve seed ya,” said Mrs. Crudge more affably; “you be a sart o’ curiositee, and they all do say as you ’aves impidence for six.”

“I think we had better go home,” Fiammetta said hastily. “Come, Janey! Good-bye, Mrs. Crudge.”

We both hurried to the door, but had n’t got further than the step when we heard Mrs. Crudge calling us. Fiammetta, thinking that she had probably repented of her rudeness, turned hastily and went into the kitchen again.”

“’Ow old be you?” Mrs. Crudge asked with interest.

“I shall be eleven in January,” Fiammetta answered, somewhat appeased by this display of interest. “Should you have thought I was older?”

“You be quite hold enough to shut the door a’ter you,” Mrs. Crudge remarked, then lay back in her chair chuckling.

I’m very much afraid that Fiammetta

banged that door, and we both of us quite forgot to bring home the basket. We walked in silence for a long way; then Fiammetta said solemnly:

"You *can't* give yourself if people won't have you. I shall tell the Voiceful Canon so next time I see him."

"Anyway, we gave her the groceries," I suggested cheerfully.

"That was n't what I went for at all; it was much more than that. I had thought of all sorts of beautiful things to say, but she put them all out of my head. I was ready to *love* Mrs. Crudge."

"She'll enjoy the tea and things now that we're gone," I said consolingly.

"But I wanted her to enjoy *us*."

And to this I could find no reply.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Fiammetta, as we neared home, very hot and tired and crestfallen, we'll go and see a dirty person next time. I expect it's because she's so clean that Mrs. Crudge is so awfully cross. Nurse is rather like that, too."

CHAPTER X

PAUL AND THE DOGS

A savoury stew,
Bones, broth, and biscuits, is prepared for you.
R. C. L.

“PAUL is a very going-by-himself kind of boy,” Fiammetta remarked during the early days of her stay with us; “he seems to like to be alone.”

This was true, and yet it was equally true that there never was a more sociable creature than Paul. I think the “going-by-himselfness” could be partially explained by the fact that there were so many selves: so many and so various that Paul found his own company in his different moods more exciting than that of persons with more equable dispositions. Moreover, he was much given to complain of the “crossness” of those human beings with whom he was most thrown, comparing them unfavourably with his beloved dogs in this particular, who maintained towards him an

attitude of affection as uniform as it was variously expressed.

I think all dogs adored Paul, because he talked to them so continually. Dogs are not like people in this respect, and Paul early discovered it. The more you talk to a dog the better he likes it, and he tunes his temper to your every mood. Are you merry? He frisks and frolics and jumps up at you with wild abandon. Are you sorrowful? He will lay his head softly on your knee, looking up into your face with adoring, kindly eyes that, far more prettily than any words, beg you to cheer up, and tell you that he, at all events, thinks you worthy of the utmost good fortune. The right kind of dog never lets you forget how much he loves you, and that, for most of us, is a statement that will bear much reiteration.

Paul told the dogs everything: he harangued them continually, and they certainly appeared vastly interested in his remarks. He was very strict with them as regarded their conduct, and, if they disobeyed him, smacked them vigorously. But a dog never bears any

ill-will to the smiter, provided he is assured that his chastener loves him, and never questions the justice of his punishment.

Just before Paul was five years old mother asked him what he would like for his birthday treat. He promptly replied:

"May all the dogs have mutton-chops for dinner?"

"Mutton-chops!" mother repeated in astonishment.

"They would like them so much," Paul pleaded, smiling up at her in the most ingratiating fashion.

"Father would never allow it," mother said decidedly. "You know he always says that people who really love dogs never pamper them, and our dogs always have quite as much to eat as is good for them. Why, Paul, there are lots of poor people who never *see* a mutton-chop from one year's end to the other.

Paul looked very sad, and said nothing.

"Would n't you like," mother suggested, "to give some of the very poor little children in Garchester tea in the garden on your birthday?"

Paul's birthday fell in August, and mother was always very anxious that the little children who had no gardens should sometimes come and play in ours.

"No, mother dear," Paul said firmly, "I would n't. I want the dogs to have a treat. I don't want no poor little children on *my* birthday. You can have zem for your party." He paused a minute, then in quite a new tone demanded: "Is it pampersome to give the poor little children cake?" He asked this in the detached, impersonal tone of one who thirsts for knowledge for its own sake.

"No, dear," said mother gravely; "such children have very few pleasures. Besides, they are *people*, and one ought to love people much more than dogs."

"I don't," sighed Paul; "people is much more crosser van dogs. Now, Ailsa and Gyp and Nero loves me all the time. They love me just alike all the time: they is never cross wiv me."

"But we love you just alike all the time, too," mother exclaimed; "because sometimes we have to punish you when you are naughty,

it does n't mean that we don't love you: it's *because* we love you we have to punish you."

"I like the dog-kind best," Paul said, lifting his obstinate little face to mother; "though I'm sometimes naughty to them, they loves me just the same."

"Then," said mother triumphantly, "they are better than some little boys I know."

"Vat's just what I keep on saying," Paul cried — "*much* better."

For a minute mother and Paul stared at each other in silence. The little boy leant against her knees and his mouth drooped at the corners. Mother was dreadfully sorry, but mutton-chops for all the dogs she really could not sanction. Paul knitted his downy brows in deep thought. At last he said:

"Would bones be pampersome?"

"No," mother answered, much relieved at this solution of the difficulty. "You may give them all bones on your birthday."

"Extra bones?"

"Yes, extra bones; I'll tell cook to order them."

"And may I give them my own self—

each separately in a different place, so as they
shan't quarrel?"

"Yes; you may do it before your own
dinner."

Paul flung himself upon mother to embrace
her. She lifted him on to her knee and kissed
him; but she still looked a little sad, and
Paul's heart smote him because of the poor
children.

"I'll have the children *as well as* the bones
if you like, mother dear," he said magnani-
mously; "but I could n't have them instead."

But mother shook her head, saying: "No,
little Paul. Some day, I hope, you will care
more about giving pleasure to people who
are not so well off as you are. But now it
would n't be your party, you see, if you did n't
really want them."

"Well, I truly don't — much," he replied.

So Paul had his bone-party, and was su-
premely happy, as were also his guests. But
from sundry remarks he let drop during the
day we gathered that he still hankered after
mutton-chops for his favourites.

There seemed little use in a dog belonging

to any special member of the family — Paul annexed it at once. He was a sort of Pied Piper where dogs were concerned, and although Ailsa, the sable collie, nominally belonged to mother, Gyp, the beautiful dandie, to Harry, Whisky to me, and Soda to father; though Nero, the retriever, was the stable-dog, and Floss, the pointer, lived with Ravenhill, they all followed Paul and loved him best. He told them stories, and confided to them his dearest aspirations. He prayed for them all by name every night, and considered it a hardship that none of them were allowed to sleep on his bed, the reason being that any dog allowed on Paul's bed would have been *in* it, cuddled up against him, the moment nurse's back was turned.

His first acquaintance with real grief was when old Nero, the stable-dog, during a poaching expedition on a neighbour's land, was caught in a trap, and had to be shot. Father broke the dreadful news to Paul, and, being exceedingly upset himself, I think they mingled their tears together, and Paul went heavily for many days. When Nero the sec-

ond came in slobbery puppyhood to take possession of the deserted kennel, Paul at first would have nothing to do with him, though the great, clumsy, good-natured brute pestered him with attentions in common with all the others. But one day Nero got a thorny piece of bramble in his foot, and, sitting in the middle of the yard, waved the lacerated paw, and yelped as only wounded puppy can yelp.

Paul, who had just come in from a walk with nurse, Dorcas, and Lucy, then quite a little baby, rushed to the rescue, seized the great struggling creature firmly by the injured paw with one hand, cuffed him lightly with the other to make him keep still, spoke to him reassuringly, as only Paul could speak to dogs, and deftly and quickly extracted all the thorns. From that moment Nero's place in his regard was assured.

When Sir William, during Fiammetta's visit, presented him with Thor the splendid for his very own, his love for the other dogs in no way diminished, but he distinguished Thor by generally walking with him, his hand resting on the great dog's collar. Thor was

so big, and grave and dignified in his demeanour. No one would have dreamt that he was not yet two years old. He settled into his place in our household at once, he slept stretched on the mat at the boys' bedroom door, kept most religiously to the walks or lawns in the garden, and only took violent exercise in the fields or lanes, as a well-trained dog should.

It showed the depth of Sir William's affection for Paul that he should have given Thor to him, for he was not the one of the brood of puppies that had been promised. He was a dog Sir William bought at a show when he was a puppy, and both his parents were in the Stud Book. Ailsa herself was in the Stud Book, and we were as proud of it as some folks are when their relations figure largely in what Paul called the "Hoo Hoo" book.

During Thor's first month with us he behaved like the whole Bench of Bishops rolled into one, so entirely blameless was his conduct. Then suddenly one day in Garchester he stole a leg of mutton out of a shop, and, as the despoiled butcher was not *our* butcher, there

was what father called "a deuce of a row." Of course, the mutton was paid for, and Thor beaten; this last circumstance grieving us much more than the crime, which we thought rather amusing than otherwise. There was such a delicious hullabaloo when the butcher rushed out of his shop shouting, while Thor went bounding down the street like a roebuck with the leg of mutton in his huge jaws.

Next day he chased a flock of sheep in a field near the home farm. Indignation meeting among the authorities, and beating number two for Thor. For three days he wore a chastened aspect, then he distinguished himself by eating one of Miss Goodlake's bedroom slippers, licked up a box of pills off her washstand, and was most frightfully ill. Father and Dutton and the vet. from Garchester spent half the night trying to alleviate his sufferings. When he recovered he was shown the remaining bed-shoe and a fresh box of pills, and beaten again.

We were all in a terrible state of mind while he was ill, and Paul, amidst angry sobs, gave it as his opinion that "people who leave boxes

of poisonous pills about ought to be prosecuted." Poor Miss Goodlake was as distressed as anybody, and never complained in the least over the loss of her Jaeger bed-shoe.

He recovered his ecclesiastical mien, however, and for a long time was absolutely and irreproachably virtuous; but throughout his career every three months or so would "go fantee," resembling in that respect the excellent soldier-servant of a man father knew. The servant in question was an ideal servant in all ways, except that every now and again at irregular, and sometimes inconvenient, intervals he would demand a holiday. On the first occasion his master refused him point-blank, when, most respectfully but firmly, he intimated that it would, failing permission to absent himself for two or three days, be better "for all parties" if he was to leave.

"I can't 'elp it, sir," he concluded; "I feels it comin' on, and out of your 'ouse I must go, lest I brings shame and contumely upon it. I could n't abear to do it, sir, an' missis so delicate an' all. Only three days, sir: I gives you my parol."

He was a veritable "handy man" in every respect. The household was a small one, money was not plentiful, and this man caused everything to run on oiled wheels. His master gave him leave to go, and he went. Punctually on the evening of the third day he returned. No one alluded to his absence or asked where he had been, and he went about his work quietly and efficiently as before. Months would go by before he asked for another holiday. But when the time came, his master speeded him on his way and asked no questions.

In one respect Thor's case differed very markedly from that of the soldier-servant. When *he* "went fantee" a great many questions were asked, his explanations were never considered satisfactory, and retribution surely followed. But all the same he broke out at intervals, carrying debt and destruction in his wake. Sometimes father had to pay quite large bills for Thor's doings, and yet at all other times he was the gentlest, sweetest, handsomest, most ornamental giant you can conceive of. He never did the smallest dam-

age in the garden, which may be counted to him for righteousness, unless he happened upon afternoon tea, when, with the most amiable intentions in life, he was apt to sweep half a dozen cups off the table with one swish of his great tail. Once he stole a turkey out of a shop just at Christmas-time (he always chose tradesmen other than ours for his depredations), and father had to pay eighteen shillings. Father was naturally rather annoyed at this, and in the course of conversation pointed out to Paul how naughty and tiresome Thor was, and how, if he continued in his evil courses, "he would have to go."

Paul was very solemn and impressed, but beyond expressing his sorrow at Thor's "thieffulness," said nothing more at the time.

But next day at lunch he suddenly asked father how much the cup was worth that Thor had won at a local show that autumn. The cup, which was big and handsome, and inscribed with Paul's name, adorned the sideboard at that moment.

"It's worth about ten pounds," father said.

"And the turkey cost eighteen shillings!"

cried Paul scornfully. "Why, he can pay for his stealings his own self. You all see it every day; and he's sure to win plenty more cups at shows, and, father, dear, I'll give them all to you, if you won't mind when he takes a little turkey or so."

Father did not accept the generous offer, but he told Sir William of it, who slapped his leg delightedly, exclaiming:

"Had you there, old chap! I always said that boy had the best head amongst us."

CHAPTER XI

AUNT EUNICE

Each little fault of temper and each social defect
In my erring fellow-creatures I'll endeavour to correct.
To all their little weaknesses I open people's eyes,
And little plans to snub the self-sufficient I devise.

W. S. GILBERT.

WHEN mother told us she was coming for a week there was consternation in the camp. She generally did come for a week twice a year, but none the less did the prospect of her coming create an atmosphere of uneasy foreboding, for she had an infinite capacity for being disagreeable in new and surprising ways every time she came.

She was father's aunt, and had she been prosperous or surrounded by an affectionate family, I am quite sure he would never have had her in the house; but she was old, and poor, and lonely, and I suppose she was fond of father in her way; therefore she came when she liked, and made the whole household wretched during her stay.

The only good thing about her was that she kept to her day of departure. She would announce her intended visit in a letter to mother in this wise:

“DEAR NIECE, — I can give you from Tuesday the fifteenth till the twenty-third, as I shall be leaving Bath at that date. Please let me have the red-room facing west, as it is furthest from the nursery, and you know how the clamour of crying children tries me. I have been a great sufferer lately from rheumatism, so I hope that in such an exceptionally wet summer you will see that everything is properly aired in my room. I propose to arrive by the train getting into Garchester at three-forty. Love to Henry, etc.”

Mother sent the letter upstairs into the schoolroom just before prayers, rather than tell us herself, and I read it aloud to the others. Aunt Eunice’s handwriting was most beautiful and clear.

“We may be noisy,” Harry remarked indignantly after a solemn pause, during which we tried to digest this unpleasing intelligence, “but no one can say we are *crying*. Why, even Lucy doesn’t cry, not once in a blue moon!”

"We're certain to cry, all of us, while she's here," I said gloomily. "You know she always makes us somehow. Why, I've seen mother nearly cry."

"Father swears," Paul said dreamily. "I've heard him. I suppose it makes him feel better. Do you think it would do us any good?"

"Paul," Miss Goodlake cried reprovingly, "I'm sure you've never heard your dear father do anything of the kind."

Paul did not contradict Miss Goodlake, but he smiled in a superior, knowing way at Harry, who nodded back at him.

"What's her name?" asked Fiammetta.

"Aunt Eunice," Paul answered scornfully. "Why 'nice' no one can imagine. If it was 'you nasty' there'd be some sense in it."

"Paul, Paul!" Miss Goodlake said again, though somewhat half-heartedly, for she too had suffered.

"Is she so cross, or what?" Fiammetta asked in an interested tone. "What does she *do* that you all seem so afraid of her?"

"You wait," said Harry in a voice charged

with solemn portent. "You'll know soon enough. You're just the sort of kid to fill her with fury. She'll sit upon you, you see if she does n't."

Fiammetta drew herself up, remarking with dignity:

"She can't if I'm perfectly polite to *her*, and I shall be. I expect you aggravate her somehow."

Harry laughed the hollow laugh of bitter experience, exclaiming once more as we all went down to prayers:

"You wait!"

Black Tuesday duly came, and on the morning of that dread day we formed a solemn deputation to ask mother whether during Aunt Eunice's sojourn under our roof we might have lunch as well as breakfast and tea in the schoolroom. But mother said "No," that father would n't like it, and that, after all, we saw very little of our aunt.

There was a slightly reproachful sound in mother's voice, which to a tender conscience conveyed the implication that *she* had to take every meal in the society of Aunt Eunice, and,

moreover, had to spend the whole day with her, whether she liked it or not. Presently father and mother anxiously discussed the question of who should meet the aunt in the afternoon.

If they both met her she would complain that it crowded the carriage. If father met her she would point out that in her young days it was considered respectful and decorous for a hostess to meet her elderly relatives herself. If mother met her she would be certain to reflect sarcastically on father's "press of business," which prevented his giving himself that pleasure. It never seemed to occur to either of them that it would be simpler to send the carriage by itself, as we did for ordinarily agreeable guests, and I suppose Aunt Eunice would never have pardoned them if they had.

Finally, the lot fell upon mother, and Dutton, who had seen mother "come as a bride," and still looked upon her as a delicate thoroughbred, to be shielded from every adverse wind, actually turned him on his sacred box-seat, and asked her if she found the new

landau "to her likin'," in order to show his sympathy.

We were told to play in the garden, and be ready in the schoolroom directly Aunt Eunice arrived, for although I'm sure she did n't like any of us much, she would have considered it "a slight," and been most indignant, had we not been there to be passed in review before her the instant she expressed a wish to see us.

Harry escaped this ordeal, because he was doing lessons at the Vicarage. Fiammetta was the only one of us who looked out of the window to see her arrive.

"She's not bad-looking, anyway," she exclaimed, as the carriage bowled up the drive. "She's quite a handsome old lady."

So she was. It was one of the inexplicable things about Aunt Eunice that in person she bore a decided resemblance to father. She was undoubtedly a Staniland — tall, upright, portly, fair, and fresh-coloured.

But the likeness ended there. Father was kind, patient, unselfish, careful of other people's feelings, rather silent. Aunt Eunice

. . . But the simplest way is to describe her visit.

Directly she had had tea she expressed a wish to see "Henry's children." She always spoke as if we were exclusively father's children, and that mother had nothing to do with us.

Fiammetta, Paul, Lucy, and I solemnly filed into the drawing-room, one after the other. It was a hot, sunny afternoon, and to our amazement both the French windows were shut, a most extraordinary event in our house, where windows were always open all the year round. Mother looked flushed and uncomfortable, and Paul sniffed dubiously. He said afterwards that "the room smelt cotton-woolly."

Aunt Eunice, upright, handsome, and severe, held her tortoise-shell starers to her eyes with one hand, and extended the other to us. Each of us shook it limply, except Lucy, who, accustomed to be made much of by strangers, held up her face to be kissed. Aunt Eunice pecked at her cheek, directly afterwards remarking to mother:

"Surely that child is unhealthily fat."

Mother lifted Lucy on to her knee, saying cheerfully :

"I don't think there is much the matter with Lucy, aunt dear ; look how firm she is !"

There was a moment's silence, during which Aunt Eunice eyed Lucy's sturdy proportions with distinct disfavour.

"I hope," Fiammetta said politely, "that you are not tired after your journey."

Aunt Eunice turned and glared at her through the starers, exclaiming :

"Now, what possible business is it of yours whether I am tired or not ?"

Fiammetta, much surprised at this reception of her innocent and well-meant remark, was for once completely nonplussed and said nothing, and Paul evidently considered it a good opportunity to ask loudly :

"Have you done with us now, Aunt Eunice ?"

Aunt Eunice started, and, ignoring Paul, addressed mother :

"What extraordinarily abrupt manners Henry's children seem to have ! Do they

never come downstairs into civilized society ? Look at Janey, there : did you ever see a more awkward-looking child ? ”

Naturally they all *did* look at Janey, and if it is possible to appear graceful and composed under such circumstances I envy the possessor of such serenity. I felt an insane desire to fall upon Aunt Eunice there and then and beat her. However, Paul stepped into the breach, and drew the fire of her criticism upon himself by crossing over to me, saying indignantly, as he clasped one of my limp red hands in both his own :

“Tonks and I both think Janey’s a ripping girl.”

“So do I,” Fiammetta chimed in loyally.

Aunt Eunice was not to have it all her own way, and how I loved them both !

“It is rather close in here,” mother said hastily, before Aunt Eunice could turn and rend Paul, “with so many people ; you ’d better run away, children, and make the most of such a fine evening out-of-doors. Would you care to come out, aunt dear, or will you rest ? ”

We did not wait to hear Aunt Eunice's answer: we fled. But later in the evening, when we chanced to meet her with father, who was dutifully showing her the garden, we heard her anxiously inquiring whether he considered Paul "quite right in his head," for she herself had grave doubts upon the subject.

When father and his brothers were quite little boys, their mother died, and Aunt Eunice went and kept house for grandfather for three years. Then he married again, and Aunt Eunice never forgave the children for not being miserable with their stepmother. Far from being miserable, they loved their new mother dearly, for she was wise and kind and understanding. She was also most long-suffering with Aunt Eunice, who always spoke as though the children and the Court (especially the Court) had been cruelly reft from her by some shamefully underhand means; and ever after she proclaimed far and near the "sacrifices" she had made for her brother and his children. Precisely what those sacrifices

were no one could ever discover, but by dint of constant reiteration the children themselves grew to believe in them; and because they could not whole-heartedly love their aunt, there grew up, especially in father, a guilty feeling that she had in some way been badly treated, and that he must try and make it up to her. Hence his patience with her humours. Besides, as Thackeray points out, there is nothing in the world so successful in obtaining your own way in this world as a healthily-developed, terrorizing bad-temper. Ordinary peace-loving people will do almost anything to prevent a scene.

This visit of Aunt Eunice's stands out in my mind as particularly dreadful, because she had taken it into her head that a window open anywhere in her vicinity increased her rheumatism, and wherever she was the windows had to be shut.

One good came of it, however, for on the third day of her visit mother decided that, in July, luncheon for eight people in a room with shut windows was impossible. So we got our wish, and we, with Miss Goodlake, were

banished to the schoolroom, greatly to our comfort.

Aunt Eunice hated dogs. The presence of one within ten yards of her filled her with a sort of angry terror, and while she was with us no dog was allowed to come into any room she honoured with her presence.

The fuss began the very morning after her arrival, at prayers. Thor always attended prayers, coming in with Paul, laying his great length beside Paul's chair, and remaining absolutely statue-like till the servants went out again. Mother never noticed that Thor did come till he had been present two or three days, and as he behaved with such perfect propriety, there seemed no reason why he should be debarred from a pious exercise he so evidently appreciated.

Most people liked to see the huge solemn beast, his beautiful head between his paws, watching the kneeling household with patient liquid, brown eyes, so still and quiet. But the moment Aunt Eunice spied him — he was so big that he could n't be successfully hidden, though we tried to by surrounding him in a

crowd as we came in — she forthwith cried out that “that enormous dog must leave the room, or *I* must.”

“Put him out, Paul,” father said, with a perfectly expressionless face; and Paul called Thor, who followed him obediently, looking very puzzled.

“Shall I stay with him, father?” Paul asked, when he reached the door; “he won’t like stopping out there by himself. We can say our prayers outside in the hall together if you like.”

But Aunt Eunice exclaimed: “What nonsense!” And Paul shut the dining-room door and went back to his place.

Hardly had the murmur of our united voices reached “We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep” in the first prayer than there came such a tremendous lunge of some heavy body against the oaken door as shook the room. It was impossible for us to pretend we didn’t hear it, and we looked at one another significantly. Father’s face was buried in his hands, mother’s voice was ominously tremulous, Aunt Eunice looked as

scandalized as if she had had nothing to do with it.

The petition went on till it reached "restore Thou them that are penitent," when that earth-shaking sound occurred again, accompanied by two sharp knocks, caused by Thor's whisking his tail violently against the shut door.

We children all laid our heads down on our arms, shaking with silent laughter, but no one went out to console Thor, and by the time mother, who read the next prayer by herself, had reached "and grant that this day we fall into no sin," Thor uplifted his voice in such a blood-curdling howl as might have been emitted by some lost soul shut out of Paradise. Every dog about the place broke into furious barking. Father got up from his knees and went out.

There were no more onslaughts made upon the door, but the rest of prayers was disturbed by distant and irregular yappings.

When the flushed and heated servants had filed out with their wonted decorum, we did not wait to hear Aunt Eunice's animadver-

sions upon Thor's conduct, but, once out in the hall, rushed helter-skelter to find what father had done with him. They had apparently vanished into space; but after a wild rush round house and kitchen garden, regardless of the fact that we ought all three to have gone straight to the schoolroom for lessons — poor Harry had to flee to the Vicarage instantly after prayers — we found them in the stable-yard explaining things to Dutton, who grinned and remarked cryptically, "There's some dogs as do seem more Christian-like than them as 'ave bin baptized."

"Thor is a very religious dog," Paul chimed in. "He felt it very much, didn't you, my dear?" and Thor hit us over the legs with his tail in a perfect ecstasy of appreciation.

That very morning while I was having a music-lesson, and Paul had disappeared into some secret place where he could read undisturbed, Fiammetta, seeing Aunt Eunice enthroned in a tented chair upon the lawn, took it into her head to join her there. Aunt Eunice had finished the morning paper, and was crocheting red worsted cuffs. She al-

ways worked at warm garments of some sort in summer, and made pointlace in winter.

When she saw Fiammetta coming across the grass towards her she smiled quite pleasantly, and Fiammetta, who always expected people to be glad to see her, sat down at the old lady's feet, remarking:

"I saw you sitting out here all alone, and thought you must be dull, so I've come to keep you company."

Aunt Eunice looked rather surprised, but said nothing severer than "Really!"

"Sometimes I like to be alone, and sometimes I don't. Which do you like best?" Fiammetta continued confidentially.

"It depends on the company," Aunt Eunice said guardedly. "Solitude is infinitely preferable to uncongenial society."

"Yes, is n't it?" Fiammetta cried in eager agreement. "Some people are so horrid one would go miles to get out of their way."

"I should not dream of taking the trouble to go miles to get out of anybody's way," Aunt Eunice remarked severely. "Such a

course would be both exaggerated and unnecessary."

"Should you tell *them* to go away, then?" Fiammetta asked in a tone of the deepest interest, "or what?"

Aunt Eunice laid down her crochet and took up her starers, looking through them suspiciously at Fiammetta, and the action started a new train of thought in the mind of that volatile maiden, for she instantly exclaimed:

"How funny and large people's eyes look through glasses, don't they?—like marbles in a toyshop!"

"I do not see the smallest resemblance between the human eye and a marble," Aunt Eunice said coldly.

"Oh, not really, you know," Fiammetta continued, quite unconscious of offence: "only when there's glasses, large glasses like yours. Why don't you have spectacles, Miss Staniland? then you wouldn't need to hold them on all the time."

Aunt Eunice dropped her starers and took up her crochet again in silence, but the freez-

ing glance she cast upon Fiammetta was completely lost, for on receiving no answer to her last question, she promptly asked another, demanding eagerly:

"Have you always disliked dogs all your life, or is it only since you were old? Perhaps you were bitten once and that makes you nervous. It's rather awkward, though, isn't it, when you come to stay in a house where people are fond of them. I was just a little bit timid when I first came, but I don't mind them a bit now. I dare say you could get over it too, if you were to try."

Aunt Eunice positively gasped at the audacity of this speech, and once more gave Fiammetta a look that ought to have withered her up. But Fiammetta, unconcernedly tearing a laurel leaf to pieces, was blissfully unconscious of her companion's annoyance, so was quite unprepared for the tone in which Aunt Eunice exclaimed:

"I really decline to explain the why and wherefore of any of my likes and dislikes to you. Have you never been taught, miss, how rude it is to ask questions?"

“No,” Fiammetta replied earnestly — “no, Miss Staniland, I have n’t. I’ve been told, of course, about personal remarks and clothes and things. I’m sure I never *meant* to be rude. What is one to talk about if one may n’t ask any questions?”

“Little girls should talk as little as possible,” Aunt Eunice said more mildly, somewhat mollified by the spirit in which Fiammetta had accepted her rebuke. “They should listen, and try to answer nicely when they are spoken to.”

There was dead silence for a minute, then Fiammetta said: “I’m listening.”

Aunt Eunice chuckled: “Well, you’ll probably hear one of those innumerable dogs bark in a minute.”

Silence again.

No dog barked.

Aunt Eunice continued to crochet, while Fiammetta gazed at her hungrily, at last exclaiming desperately:

“Miss Staniland, how can I listen *or* answer you nicely if you don’t speak to me?”

“Silence is golden,” said Aunt Eunice.

“It’s very dull, anyway,” Fiammetta cried,

scrambling to her feet; "but, of course, if you *can't* think of anything to say it's not your fault. Good-bye, Miss Staniland; I see Janey going down the drive, so she has finished her lesson."

And before Aunt Eunice could recover from her amazement at Fiammetta's temerity, that damsel had raced across the lawn out of earshot.

"I don't call her cross so much as dull," Fiammetta confided to me. "She has *no* general conversation."

When mother joined Aunt Eunice on the lawn just before lunch, she found that lady in a very bad temper indeed.

"That Glynn child is the most impertinent little minx I have ever come across," she said angrily. "I can't think how you can allow her to associate with Janey. Janey is *gauche* and stupid enough as it is, but if she exchanges her present lack of manner for the cool assurance of her friend it will certainly be a change for the worse. I can't think what you and Henry are about to allow it for one minute—upon my word I can't!"

"I think, Aunt Eunice," mother said meekly, "that you are doing Fiammetta an injustice; she may be rather comically grown-up in her manner sometimes, but I am quite sure she never means to be rude. She is far too anxious to please for that. I assure you she is a most affectionate and biddable child, really."

Aunt Eunice grunted, and then, with her accustomed abruptness, dismissed the question with the trite remark: "Jane, I really don't know which is the bigger fool where children are concerned, you or Henry."

That evening it fell to my lot to accompany father and Aunt Eunice for a walk to a distant cottage that he was rebuilding. Fiammetta positively declined to come, as she said she knew that she would offend Aunt Eunice "somehow" if she did. I walked hand-in-hand with father, and was not unhappy, for Aunt Eunice walked on his other side, and I was spared much direct attention on her part. She did at one period regret that I was so common-looking, but as she followed up the statement with a remark to the effect that I was the "image of mother," I was not greatly

cast down. She further pointed out that Paul, who was rather small and thin, was "weedy," and that Harry, who was big and broad, was a "stocky, clumsy lad"; but as father did not contradict her, accepting all her strictures upon his belongings with the utmost good-humour, she presently consented to be quite interested in the cottage, only taking care to point out that it was a waste of money to have done anything at all to such a ramshackle old place.

Only once did she rouse him to anything approaching opposition, and that was when she "thought it her duty to tell him" that Eliza, our pearl among parlourmaids, "had n't the vaguest idea of the proper way to pour out wine."

"I have already mentioned the matter to Jane, but she did n't seem to understand what I meant."

"Neither do I," said father shortly. "We've always considered that both the maids wait uncommonly well, and as Jane is very particular about these things, you may quite safely leave it to her."

I ventured to give the big warm hand that held mine a little squeeze, which was returned. I think Aunt Eunice must have been conscious of it in some way, for it was at this juncture that she grieved so over my plebeian appearance.

CHAPTER XII

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

That innate malevolence so frequently manifested by inanimate objects.

Science Siftings.

WEDNESDAY passed in comparative peacefulness, but on Thursday morning Aunt Eunice made the most upsetting statement she had yet ventured upon. She declared that half a sovereign had been taken off her dressing-table. She made the announcement just before lunch, saying :

“ I laid it there myself on the left-hand side of the mirror when I went into my room to fetch my work about eleven o'clock, and when I came to look for it just now it is nowhere to be seen.”

“ Don't you think it may have been knocked off, and has rolled away somewhere ? ” mother suggested ; “ I don't like to say anything to the servants till we are perfectly sure that it is n't lying unnoticed in some corner. It is

always so unpleasant for them, and I am confident that they are all as honest as they can be."

"I know it's a most unpleasant thing," Aunt Eunice agreed, "and had it not been that I considered it my duty, I should never have mentioned it, but I thought it right to put you on your guard. I have looked everywhere, of course, but you are at perfect liberty to look yourself if you wish to. But, mark my words, that half-sovereign has *gone*, and it could n't go without hands."

Mother set off upstairs to look. On the way she called in for Miss Goodlake; Miss Goodlake called us, and we there and then organised a search-party in Aunt Eunice's room.

We hunted over every yard of carpet, under the bed did we sprawl, and Paul even squeezed under the chest of drawers, but no half-sovereign did we find.

The lunch-gong sounded, and mother descended hurriedly, to find that Aunt Eunice had poured her grievance into father's ears, and he was looking hot and worried. Their

lunch, I understand, was a silent meal. Ours, on the contrary, was lively in the extreme, for we all emulated the renowned Sherlock Holmes, suggesting innumerable theories as to the cause of the half-sovereign's unlucky absence, and as we all talked at once, there was a considerable noise.

After the servants' dinner, mother sent for Clay and Vallender, the two housemaids, and told them what had happened. She made it very clear to them that she was sure the half-sovereign must have "rolled somewhere," and asked them to have a thorough search in every nook and cranny of the red-room.

Vallender, who "did" the room, declared that there was certainly no half-sovereign on the floor when she "picked up the bits" with dustpan and brush that morning; and Clay, who was tall and of a most unapproachable dignity, contented herself with saying, "I will do so, mum," when mother finally begged them to look very carefully indeed. They took up Aunt Eunice's carpet that afternoon, but no half-sovereign was secreted underneath.

When Dorcas brought up our tea she was

tearful and sniffed lugubriously, for it seemed that she had assisted in some small fashion in the "doing" of Aunt Eunice's room, that nurse had remonstrated with her at the time for "trying to do other people's work when she had plenty of her own if she'd only do it," and now kept "naggin' at her," and pointing out what a lot of worry and anxiety she would have been saved if she had minded her own business, and never entered the red-room at all, which was pretty hard upon Dorcas.

Next morning, as Paul put it, "we had n't found sixpence of it." The servants all looked offended, and would speak to none of us. Paul was particularly fidgety and depressed, so much so that one might have suspected him of being the thief, but that he finally unburdened himself to Harry of the dreadful suspicion that oppressed his soul.

"Do you fink," he asked with tearful solemnity, "vat Thor could have swallowed it up like he did the pills, and will it make him ill?"

Harry, however, was against that theory.

Moreover, it was possible to prove an *alibi* in Thor's case. His movements during the whole of Wednesday morning were known, and he had not gone near Aunt Eunice's room.

"He might have done it, you know, out of revenge," Paul explained in support of his theory, "like the elephant squirted dirty water over the tailor."

"I don't think Thor is revengeful," Harry said seriously; "he's too big."

"An elephant's bigger than Thor, and *he* was revengeful," Paul objected.

"But do you think Thor knows that Aunt Eunice does n't like him?" Harry asked.

"Of course he knows," Paul said scornfully; "he'd like to be friends if she'd let him, but he *knows* well enough. He says his prayers very nicely out in the hall with me, but he does n't like it so much. He's unhappy, you can see."

The matter of Thor's presence at prayers had been compromised, and in this wise: Paul stayed with him in the hall, and mother left the dining-room door open. She could see Paul and Thor, but Aunt Eunice could n't,

and mother said that Thor's pleading, puzzled eyes were the most pathetic thing in the world. He lay quite still, but he lifted his great head from time to time and looked at Paul, and then back into the room, asking as plainly as possible in his mind: "Why have we got to stay out here? What have we done that we mayn't say our prayers with the others?"

Father wouldn't have him shut up right away, for he said if that were done Thor would lose his beautiful manners. The most trying thing for the rest of the household about this arrangement was that Paul insisted on saying all the prayers in a stage whisper that resounded through the house, and nobody liked to tell him of it lest, peradventure, the genial current of his religious enthusiasm might be chilled.

On Friday the half-sovereign was still missing.

Aunt Eunice continued to make remarks to the effect that it "could n't have gone without hands," and nurse would state severely at

intervals that you "never find nothink except where it is."

Mother had, privately, to pacify the outraged susceptibilities of Clay and Vallender, who were both of our own village and from families of almost austere respectability.

As for Dorcas, she grew so touchy and sensitive that if one mentioned so much as twopence halfpenny in her presence she left the room hurriedly and dissolved into tears.

By Friday evening we would all of us have concurred most heartily in the statement that "money is the root of all evil."

Father would gladly have paid that half-sovereign over and over again, if only the subject might have dropped. But any suggestion of refunding the money would have been met by Aunt Eunice as a personal insult. Its disappearance was "wrop up in a mis'try," and was distinctly unpleasant for everybody.

"I'm not a person to lose things," Aunt Eunice remarked on Saturday, apropos of the eternal subject, as we all sat on the lawn after tea; "I have only lost two things in all my

life: a thimble (and that was swept away, I have no doubt, by an officious housemaid), and a tea-basket coming from Switzerland once. I expect that was stolen, for although I made every inquiry, it could never be traced."

"Now you've lost three," Harry announced.

"Pardon me, Harry, I did not *lose* that half-sovereign. It has vanished, certainly, but that is a very different thing, and it is particularly vexatious, for I had put it there to take to the Vicar that afternoon as my contribution towards the new harmonium for the schoolroom. It's a most peculiar thing—very peculiar."

"Do you mean that you think it's stolen, Aunt Eunice?" asked Harry the downright.

"I don't *mean* anything: I only state a plain fact. The half-sovereign has been taken; how, or by whom, it seems at present impossible to discover. When you have lost a few more valuables, perhaps you will take steps to find out."

There was silence for a full minute while each and all of us took Aunt Eunice's last

speech to heart. Then Paul, who was lying on the grass at her feet, suddenly uprose, and in tone of the greatest excitement, exclaimed :

“Will you all keep *quite* quiet and look at Aunt Eunice ?”

Of course, instead of keeping quiet, we all crowded round, except father and mother, who sat where they were, looking rather alarmed as to what would happen to Paul when Aunt Eunice should recover from her astonishment.

“Aunt Eunice is the thief !” Paul exclaimed dramatically. He had been re-reading Sherlock Holmes, and admired his methods. “She has got the money on her, and in a very silly place, too. Look !”

And as he spoke Paul stooped down, and, without moving it, showed the assembled company the missing coin, sitting comfortably on the top of a flounce that adorned the foot of Aunt Eunice’s skirt.

Father sat forward in his chair : he smiled, but said nothing ; then Fiammetta, who was the incarnation of the eternal feminine, said softly :

“It could n’t have gone without hands.”

But if Aunt Eunice was cross she was also honest, for, instead of coming down on Fiammetta for her impertinence, all she said was :

“Harry, my dear, will you fetch the servants and let them see just where the half-sovereign was, before we move it? I must have swept it off the table with my knitting, and, of course, as it caught in my skirt, I did not hear it fall.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE RAIDERS

Oh, don't the days seem lank and long
When all goes right and nothing goes wrong,
And is n't your life extremely flat
With nothing whatever to grumble at !

W. S. GILBERT.

"IN olden days, when people were persecuted, they fled away to some distant land; an island is best. Let us go to the island beyond the tennis lawn, and pretend it's a haven of refuge. I'm sure *we've* been persecuted enough for anything this last few days."

It was Fiammetta who spoke. Her soul was sore within her, for not only had Aunt Eunice snubbed her in the schoolroom after breakfast, but Dutton, during our ride (he was teaching Fiammetta to ride) had declared that she sat her pony like "a faggot of wood."

"The worst persecutor goes to-morrow," Paul said thoughtfully, "but here's to-day to

get through, and everybody will be too busy to interfere much 'cause of the dinner-party to-night. Thor feels very persecuted: he told me so. Religious persecution 's the worst kind of all — Miss Goodlake said so."

"The party 's a sort of send-off to Aunt Eunice; she's going to-morrow," Harry explained to Claude from the Vicarage, who was spending the afternoon. "I don't wonder they have some sort of a jollification."

"My father and mother are coming," Claude informed us; "I heard them grumbling over it this morning at breakfast."

"Enough to make anyone grumble," Harry replied sympathetically; "but they'll get a good dinner, I fancy. The very biggest peaches have been gathered; I saw them in a basket all cotton-wool and stuff."

"If we go to the island for the afternoon we'll need provisions," said Fiammetta. "It's no use being cast on a desert island without provisions, and we'd better just take them. No one will give us anything; they're all so busy, and sure to be cross. The island beyond the tennis-lawn would do beautifully,

and when we're on we'll take the board away, and then no one can get at us; we'd be quite safe."

"They might jump," I suggested.

"Pooh! Grown-up people can't jump," Claude said scornfully. His parents were portly, and not given to violent exercise of any sort.

"Father can," Fiammetta put in.

"Yes; but he's a young sort of father," Paul explained. "He's more like a young uncle than anyone's father."

"Well, he's mine, anyway," Fiammetta rejoined rather huffily, "and he's just as fatherish as anyone else's. I don't see why fathers *need* be fat and old."

"They generally are, really," Claude said seriously. "So are mothers."

"Our mother is n't old or fat," I objected. "She'd be just like any other grown-up young lady if it was n't for us."

"I suppose she would," Claude allowed, rather grudgingly, however; "but squire is n't so young, anyhow, *or* thin."

"He's nice and tall for his stoutness,

though," Harry chimed in. "Everyone about here thinks father a very fine man."

"So do I," Claude agreed with the utmost heartiness. "He's a ripping man. I'd like to grow up just like him. But I don't suppose I shall," he added modestly.

We all smiled encouragingly at Claude, and Fiammetta, who was never at a loss, said graciously:

"I dare say you'll be quite a nice-sized man when you're grown up. You aren't at all a bad-looking boy as it is, but for your nose, and that may grow narrower by-and-by."

"If we wait till Claude is grown up and handsome before we go over to that island," Paul remarked sarcastically, "it will p'obably have got joined on to the land by that time."

"Let's go now, at once," cried Fiammetta the ever-ready; "but first we must make a raid for the things we want."

"The cellar's open," said Harry; "they're putting out wine for to-night, and I'll make a raid for a restorative. One always needs a restorative on islands—it says so in all the books of travels. Brandy's the best, but

it's so beastly nasty. I'll try and get sherry. It's not half bad with sugar. I tried some the other day when the things were going out from lunch; someone had left quite a lot in his glass."

"Janey and I'll steal flour," Fiammetta settled.

"And I'll steal a pot of jam," Paul added. "There's some very good new strawberry, made about a fortnight ago. We can call it 'preserved fruits'; it sounds more wreckish."

"What had I better steal?" Claude asked, not liking to be left out in the general pillage. "I'll go home and steal anything you want."

"Oh, don't go home. Let's do all the stealing in one place," Fiammetta said, knitting her brows thoughtfully. "You see, if we're *really* bold, bad buccaneers, we must be quite callous and heartless, and stick at nothing. You might repent in the softening air of home. Even murderers do, especially so near a church. Do you think he could get some biscuits anywhere?" she asked, quite in a different tone.

"But I don't like stealing things in other

people's houses," Claude objected. "I'll go home and get them out of that china sort of box on the sideboard. They're not very nice, though: they've been there such a time—that dry kind, you know, that makes you cough."

"Oh, *they're* no use," Harry said decidedly. "We won't have them. Tell you what: you get some milk from somewhere, and we'll make posset with the sherry. I've had it once when I had a cold. It's ripping stuff!"

"Doesn't it need to be boiled or something?" asked Paul, who included cookery-books in his general reading.

"We'll make a fire and boil it," Harry exclaimed magnificently. "Some of us will have a chill on purpose."

"Shall I just ask for the milk?" Claude said eagerly. "They'd give it me like a shot if I did."

"No, no! You're not to go home. There's always milk in the day-nursery for Lucy. You can take that. Nurse is out with her; they've gone to the village to get something for

mother. You just go up quietly and get it—no one will see you—and then creep into the scullery and get a saucepan of some sort. We'll need that, you see, to make the posset."

"Who is the captain of this band?" Paul asked in a solemn voice. He liked everything to be clearly arranged.

Claude and Harry looked at one another for a minute; then, with a sigh of self-abnegation, Claude said:

"You'd better be it, old chap, and I'll be the mate. Paul and the girls can be the crew, and if they mutiny we'll put them in irons."

"No, that you shan't," Fiammetta said hastily. "I should n't like it. Besides, we're not going to mutiny. Let's get the things and go."

Miss Goodlake and mother had driven into the town to do sundry commissions. Nurse was out, and we had been given a free afternoon to play in the garden as we pleased. Father would never allow us to be benursed or begovernessed in the garden. It was our kingdom, and so long as we did little damage

to flowers or trees, we did much as we pleased, for which blessed liberty we have thanked him all our lives. I do pity the unhappy children who are everlastingly watched and directed in their play. They very probably get into no scrapes, but what a lot of fun they miss!

Our council of war was held in the largest wheelbarrow on the shady side of the house, and when the various contributions to the commissariat had been decided upon, we set forth upon our several errands with a pleasing sense of importance and adventure.

"We may only be the crew," I remarked to Fiammetta when we arrived at the back-door, "but they've given us about the most dangerous thing to do. How do you suppose we're going to get into the larder to the flour-bin without being seen? Why, cook'll be in and out all the afternoon! They're all bustling about all over the place."

Fiammetta shook her head without speaking, looked down the passage and listened.

"Now!" she whispered dramatically; and we both crept on tip-toe.

As luck would have it, we got round the

corner without meeting anybody. In another minute we were safe in the big, cool larder, with the heavy swing-door shut behind us. The wide stone shelves were loaded with all sorts of nice things for the evening. But these did not attract us. What we wanted was flour. Flour, wherewith to make the little cakes than can be baked so beautifully in the summer sun.

Owing to the fulness of the under-shelf cook had lifted the great earthenware jar, marked FLOUR in white letters, on to the shelf above, and we found we could neither of us reach it, nor had we brought anything with us in which to take the flour away if by strategy we contrived to do so. Fiammetta, however, was nothing if not resourceful.

"If I climb up on the lower shelf," she suggested, "perhaps I could tip the jar and scoop some into your pinafore. Then, when we've got safely away, we'll put it in something else."

No sooner said than attempted. We carefully cleared a little space on the loaded lowest shelf; but it is not easy to get foot-

hold on one shelf below another of precisely the same width. Moreover, Fiammetta was by no means an expert in the art of climbing. Finally, the difficulty was surmounted, and in this wise: I arrayed Fiammetta in my pinafore (words cannot express my joy at divesting myself of the obnoxious garment. She, happy maiden, had no pinafores!), then I scrambled up to the top shelf — I had had considerably more practice in climbing of all kinds than Fiammetta — and found that I could just stand upright on the upper shelf, which was comparatively empty, and, to my joy, discovered that there was a big scoop in the flour-jar, and that I shouldn't need to tip it at all.

But have you ever tried to throw flour from a height into somebody's pinafore a good yard below you? Before I had thrown down two scoopfuls Fiammetta was white as a miller, and began to cough and sneeze to an alarming extent.

“Get out of the way!” I cried in consternation; “I hear someone coming: I want to jump. Hide somewhere, quick!”

Fiammetta darted into a corner behind a great basket used in winter for potatoes; I followed just in time to see cook's angry face look in, apparently see nothing, and depart again, banging the door angrily.

"It's a mercy we were behind the door," I whispered; "and the larder's a bit dark, or she'd have seen the spilt flour. D'you think we've got enough?"

"More than enough," Fiammetta retorted crossly; "I'm all over it, hair and all."

"We'll get it off directly we're safe away from the house," I replied soothingly. "Don't you think we'd better fly now? the coast seems pretty clear."

Fiammetta, looking like a disreputable Pierrot, crept from behind the potato-basket. I helped myself to a few of those useful vegetables, and we both listened breathlessly at the door before venturing to make a dash for it.

"Now," said Fiammetta, and seized the handle. "It seems stiff," somehow," she said, after fumbling for a minute. "You try, Janey: you're stronger than me, and you

can take two hands if you put down those potatoes."

I tried, but the door would not budge.

"Push, Janey!" Fiammetta cried impatiently, "push, and I'll push, too; it must have got stuck somehow."

It most certainly had got stuck, for we pushed and twirled and fumbled till we were tired, but the heavy door did not even shake in its frame.

Breathless, we desisted from our efforts, and stood looking at one another.

In her excitement Fiammetta had let go of the pinafore, and the raided flour was scattered over the stone floor.

Then the fell truth dawned upon me. There was a spring catch on the outside of the larder door, and when cook slammed it, it shut of itself, or, more likely, she had shut it on purpose.

Fiammetta and I stared at each other in horror, for the prospect of wasting the afternoon shut up in the larder in no way smiled upon us.

To shout for assistance meant explanation, scolding, punishment—probably bed.

Now, of all detestable places in which to spend a fine summer afternoon, bed is the most horrid, and bed was a favourite form of discipline in our family. Even the larder was preferable to bed.

We talked the matter over, and came to that conclusion, finally deciding that next time cook, or anybody came to the door we would bounce out at her, and make a bolt for it before she had recovered from her fright.

This plan, I grieve to say, was mine. Fiammetta the impatient and high-minded was for giving ourselves up there and then, and trusting to cook's clemency. But I had had previous experience of cook's mood on dinner-party days, and overruled her.

So we set ourselves to wait on the opening side of the door, with what patience we could muster.

In the meantime Paul had set forth by a different route to obtain his "preserved fruits."

Paul always liked to do things alone, for he told himself a story as he went. He was invariably the hero of the story, and anyone

passing him on that afternoon would have noted that his solemn lurching stride indicated a sea-faring man of truculent appearance and callous disposition, and might have heard fragments of sentences describing a ruffian "with a bushy black beard and glittering red eyes."

The desperado in question in reality was a thin, small boy in a sailor suit (it was so dirty that nurse had forborne to cover it with a smock), who wore upon his head a dilapidated cotton hat. None of us could imagine why Paul was so wedded to this somewhat infantile form of head-gear, but afterwards we discovered that he fancied it bore a resemblance to the hats worn by the Garchester Cricket Eleven when they were fielding in the sun, and nothing would induce him to wear any other "about the place."

He went in at the front-door and straight to the morning-room, and, as he expected, the cupboard door was open. Row upon row of pots of jam, entrancing in their varied size and whiteness, met his gaze, and he was advancing to seize his prize when he happened to turn his head, and his attention was caught

by an opened parcel lying on mother's desk by the window. She had evidently begun to undo it just as she was going out, and the carriage had probably been announced before she could put the contents of the parcel away. We never kept the horses waiting in our house.

Books were in that parcel—six big, flat books exactly alike, in the dear familiar brown binding, each bearing on its face a well-loved effigy in gilt. Behold the last three years of *Mr. Punch*, fresh from the binder's hands!

The seafaring man with "bushy beard and sparkling red eyes" faded from Paul's mind even as yesterday's sum vanishes from a slate under the application of the schoolroom duster. He seized a volume and dived under the table. He forgot the island, Harry, Claude, all of us. People came in and out of the room, but no one noticed Paul, for he sat silent in rapt beatitude, reading that blessed brief of honest fun that has so thoroughly fulfilled kind Thackeray's hope on its behalf.

A low two-shelf bookcase formed a dado right round our drawing-room, and on one

long, lowest shelf, so low that the smallest hands could reach the books, was the ever-lengthening row of *Punches* at the beck and call of the careful child — a never-ending mine of varied pleasure.

Meanwhile, Claude and Harry had secured saucepan, milk, and a bottle of sherry without much adventure. Harry had not troubled to descend to the cellar.

“A lot of wine was lying on the sideboard, some of it in straw cases,” he said afterwards, “so I took a bottle with a green seal marked ‘Sherry.’ It was awfully dirty, but I wiped it with my handkerchief and put it under my coat.”

They reached the island unchallenged by anyone, and immediately set to work to make a fire, which they managed without much difficulty, as Harry had annexed the school-room matches and there were plenty of dry sticks.

“I can’t think where the others can be,” Claude said breathlessly, lifting a heated, grubby face from the fire he had been blowing in the most primitive way of all — with his

breath. "D'you think anything can have happened to them?"

"I don't know, unless Paul's fallen down and cut himself with the jam-pot," Harry answered gloomily; "it would be just like him to do it: he's such a moony sort of chap."

"But the girls?" Claude continued. He was kind-hearted, and hated us to be left out. "Where ever can they be? We shall never drink all that sherry by ourselves, shall we?"

"We need n't drink it *all*," Harry replied cheeringly. "We'll keep some for them when they do turn up; but we'd better make the posset, so's to be ready when they do come."

Claude emptied the jug of milk into the saucepan, and Harry, having no corkscrew, broke the neck of the sherry bottle with a piece of slate, and the sherry spurted all over his knickerbockers.

"How strong it smells!" Claude remarked, sniffing dubiously. "I don't care for it much, do you?"

"It's the taste that's so good," said Harry. "You just wait."

Claude held the saucepan, and Harry tilted the greater part of the sherry into it.

"It looks a lot when they're put together, doesn't it?" he exclaimed proudly. "Now we must boil it up."

"What are we to drink out of?" Claude inquired. He was much given to making difficulties, and we found it rather trying.

Triumphantly, Harry the prudent produced a tin mug from the pocket of his jacket. Claude gave a sigh of relief, and they set themselves to the somewhat difficult task of balancing the saucepan on the top of the burning sticks.

It was a large saucepan and decidedly heavy, for it contained nearly a quart of the mixture, and the moment they placed it on the pyramid of burning sticks the whole construction collapsed, and the fire showed every sign of speedy extinction.

"Tell you what," said Harry, when, with great difficulty, they had built up the fire again and coaxed it into a blaze, "one of us must hold it over the flame. We'll take it in turns, then it won't squash the fire out."

They held it by turns; they burnt their hands with the saucepan handle, and they spilt a good deal of the mixture, finally wrapping the scorching handle in several folds of dock-leaf to make it bearable. The July sun shone down upon them, and a strong smell of burning milk mingled with the odour of sherry. Wasps, flies, and innumerable bees buzzed round them, but the perspiring boys stuck to their saucepan manfully.

Suddenly Claude, who was doing his turn of holding, gave a shout of dismay.

"It's turning into a pudding," he cried; "it's all got thick and lumpy—no mortal could drink *that!*"

"Lift it off, quick!" shouted Harry. "It's all right—posset's like that, thick *and* thin, you know; there's lots of thin underneath, you'll see."

The saucepan lay on the grass between them, and Harry made a dive with the tin cup and scooped out a mixture which was assuredly thick *and* thin, but mostly thick; moreover, it had a very strong and peculiar smell.

"Have some," he said, hospitably pressing the tin cup of scalding mixture on the crimson Claude; "it's ripping stuff — you try it."

"You have some first," Claude cried, waving the cup away with a gesture of noble self-abnegation. "I'm in no hurry, really. Whew! it is hot, ain't it?"

"Oh, you must have some first," cried Harry, on hospitable thoughts intent; "you're the visitor, you know. Hurry up, there's a good chap. I want some myself, you know."

Thus adjured, Claude seized the tin mug manfully, but it was so hot he nearly dropped it.

"I'm afraid I can't drink it *yet*," he gasped; "it's so awf'ly hot. It's rather a hot afternoon, too, isn't it?" he added pleadingly.

"People drink scalding tea, however hot it is," Harry said severely. "I've heard Miss Goodlake say that the hotter things you drink in hot weather, the cooler you get. It's cold things that are bad when the weather's hot."

"But tea is n't *thick*," Claude pleaded.

"It's the thickness that's so good," Harry

replied sententiously: "that's the *posset* part. Here, you stir it with this stick; it'll soon be cool enough then."

Obediently, Claude stirred the contents of his mug with a stick that left black pathways in the stodgy mixture.

"It seems very full of bits and things," he said; "ash and stuff seems to have got in somehow."

"Oh, a little clean wood-ash won't hurt you!" Harry cried impatiently; "some people clean their teeth with ash: it's awfully good stuff."

"I think, perhaps, it's cool enough now," sighed Claude, and, tightly screwing up his eyes, he took a meagre sip of Harry's vaunted posset.

"Well, isn't it ripping?" Harry asked eagerly.

Claude handed him the mug with suspicious haste, remarking guardedly:

"It's got a peculiar taste, but I dare say one could get used to it in time. I've never had any before, you see."

He did not add that he fervently hoped he

never would again. He was a year younger than Harry, and generally followed where that gentleman led.

"Pooh!" said Harry, "that's not the way to drink posset — not in miserable sips. You want to take a good draught of it like this ——"

And with a wave of the tin mug, reminiscent of thirsty haymakers, Harry put it to his lips and tilted it.

But the long draught did not follow; with exceeding haste he laid the cheering cup on the grass beside him.

"It's too thick," he remarked to the watchful Claude; "we must strain it off a bit. Let's take the white part out, and then drink what's left."

Four grubby hands were thrust into the saucepan, and handful after handful of curd was thrown upon the dying fire, which smoked and spluttered and sent forth a most astonishing smell.

Again the boys tried the dregs of the saucepan, but they found the thin even less to their liking than the thick. The afternoon sun beat

down upon them, and there was no tree or shrub on the island to give a grateful shade.

For three good minutes they stared at each other in a silence only broken by the persistent buzz of bees, wasps, and bluebottles.

"I say," cried Harry at last, "I vote we get out of this. It's no use waiting for the others, and we're certain to get stung if we stop here. I can't think what's the matter with that posset, but it is n't a bit like cook's. Perhaps we ought to have put flour in it or something. It's all those silly girls' fault. Let's go and look for them."

"Shall we leave the things?" asked careful Claude.

"Oh, leave the beastly things just now, anyway," Harry replied crossly; "no one'll see 'em here. Come on!"

They jumped the yard-wide artificial stream that separated the island from the rest of the garden, and strolled homewards by the shadiest paths they could find.

Aunt Eunice had declined to accompany mother and Miss Goodlake into Garchester, on the ground that "other people's shopping

is the dullest thing on earth." Instead, she announced her intention of paying a call in the village, and commanded father to attend her.

The old ladies she wished to honour lived about half a mile away, and she decided that she could walk there in spite of rheumatism. "We can rest there, Henry, and walk slowly back in time for tea."

Father tried to persuade her to let him drive her in the pony-trap, but she was firm; and they set off together shortly after Fiammetta and I were made prisoners in the larder.

The old ladies were out, and Aunt Eunice took it as a personal affront. She declined to go in and rest, and scolded father all the way home because she was so tired.

They came in by the back way, and round the side of the house that faced the island. Here they were met by a smell of burning milk and sherry that you could cut with a knife — a dreadful, solid, smoky smell, particularly trying on a hot afternoon.

Aunt Eunice lifted her head and sniffed, and, putting up her starers, glared at father as if he were responsible.

Father, too, sniffed nervously, and they both stood still in the middle of the path.

"It strikes me, Henry," Aunt Eunice said bitterly, "that that cook of yours is spoiling the dinner; whatever dish she happens to be concocting at the present moment is burnt — unmistakably and abominably *burnt*, and I advise you to see about it at once, for it won't be fit to come to table."

Father sniffed again, saying slowly: "That smell can't come from the kitchen. What wind there is, is this way, and the kitchen's on the other side of the house."

"It's not far off, wherever it is," Aunt Eunice answered tartly. "Are your household in the habit of doing their cooking *al fresco*, Henry?"

Just then father, who was uncommonly long-sighted, perceived Claude and Harry modestly trying to efface themselves behind some trees in the drive.

"Hi! you two!" he shouted, "come here! Where's that infernal smell coming from, eh?"

Very slowly the boys obeyed his summons,

and Harry — with a cloud of witnesses, in the shape of flies, about his head — halted some three yards distant from father.

“It’s my belief,” Aunt Eunice said severely, “that those boys have been *drinking*; there is a strong smell of ——”

“Sherry,” Harry added desperately. “I’m all over it; it’s a beastly smell, and I’m going in to change.”

“Come here,” said father.

Harry came. Claude discreetly waited where he was.

“What are those?” asked father, pointing to the large brown stains on Harry’s gray flannel suit.

“Sherry, father,” he answered mournfully. “It spurted all over me.”

“Where did you get it?” father continued, and this time there was an anxious sound in his voice.

“On the sideboard,” said Harry. “We wanted a restorative, and I thought we would make some posset.”

“*Posset!*” roared father — “with my best old golden sherry! *Posset?* What do

you mean, boy? Where did you get the sherry?"

"On the sideboard, father. It was a dirty old bottle: I did n't *touch* any of the clean ones."

Aunt Eunice could hold her tongue no longer.

"But what did you want sherry at all for, you misguided boy?" she demanded angrily, "I never heard of such a thing! Sherry, indeed, in the middle of the afternoon, at twelve years old! I compliment you, Henry, on the way your sons are growing up. So far none of our family have ever taken to drink, thank Heaven!"

"No sherry in this world ever made all that smell," father said hastily. "What else have you been doing?"

"I told you, father," Harry answered wearily — "making posset on the island in a saucepan, and it was too thick, and we burnt the pudding part; but the thin was just as nasty, and —— Look out, Aunt Eunice! there's a wasp on your bonnet!"

O, timely wasp! If there was one thing

more than another that Aunt Eunice feared and detested it was a wasp. It drove her indoors. Father sent the boys to the schoolroom to await his coming, and as he went himself to the island to quench the smoking posset, he might have been heard to murmur: "If only those two rascals had taken the red seal!"

Meanwhile, Fiammetta and I waited long and with scant patience for the opening of the larder door. At length there were steps and voices; but in our excitement we did not even try to distinguish whose steps or voices. The door was opened and we bounced out, nearly upsetting the person who was just coming in. As we expected, she was startled and gave a scream; but what we did *not* expect, was to be caught by two strong arms just as we pushed past the first-comer.

We were hustled down the passage into the light, and found ourselves in cook's custody, while AUNT EUNICE, almost speechless with rage, followed us.

It seems that when driven indoors by the wasp Aunt Eunice immediately determined to

satisfy herself that the smell of burning milk was not in any way connected with the dinner that evening. To this end she sought cook, accusing her of having allowed something to "catch" somewhere. Cook was naturally indignant, and proposed that Aunt Eunice should there and then inspect the contents of the larder to satisfy herself that nothing was in the slightest degree "caught."

"The sweets is all cold," cook said huffily, "and you can satisfy yourself, Miss Staniland, by sniffin' of 'em."

It was on her way there to reassure herself that we unfortunately "came in contact" with Aunt Eunice both literally and figuratively.

Cook was furious. Aunt Eunice was furious. Mother returned at the psychological moment, and of course we were sent to bed. Harry was sent to bed, and Claude somewhat hastily departed homewards, without bidding anyone farewell.

When Paul awoke to the realities of life, and detached his mind from *Punch*, he discovered that he was hungry and that it was

tea-time; so he wended his way schoolroom-wards, to find the schoolroom deserted, his family scattered and secluded.

Then he remembered all about the raiders, and, feeling that it was shabby and mean-spirited to keep out of the general row, he rushed downstairs and burst into the drawing-room, where mother, Aunt Eunice, and father were sitting at tea, exclaiming:

"I did it, too; I meant to steal jam, but I forgot and read *Punch* instead, but I quite *meant* to do it!"

"Go away, Paul," mother said wearily; "I'll see you after tea."

What Aunt Eunice said we never knew, but if her remarks were equal in vigour to their length I pity father and mother. We heard her voice booming away for over an hour. Considering everything, however, there is small wonder that Aunt Eunice departed with the firm conviction that "Henry's children" were wicked and unregenerate beyond belief, when "drunkenness and theft" were included among their vices.

Paul was not punished, and spent the rest

of the evening in visiting the various prisoners and consoling them in their affliction with scraps of news as to the outer world.

Just as I was dropping off to sleep, Harry came and sat on the end of my bed, exclaiming in an anxious whisper:

"I say, Janey, I've puzzled and puzzled and thought and thought, and I *can't* make out what went wrong with that posset."

CHAPTER XIV

FIAMMETTA AS NOVELIST

Then, if you 'd be impressive
Remember what I say,
That abstract qualities begin
With capitals alway :
The True, the Good, the Beautiful —
Those are the things that pay!

LEWIS CARROLL.

IN the summer people often came from London to stay from Friday till Monday. Before Fiammetta's arrival such visitors had interested us but little. We saw them at lunch, and sometimes in the garden. They very frequently did not accompany us to church, pleading important letters as the cause of such omission, and this part of their conduct filled us with indignant envy. Fiammetta, however, insisted upon making the personal acquaintance of everyone who came to the house. At lunch, sitting bland and blue-gowned on father's right hand, she would ask them questions as to their favourite pursuits,

for all the world as though *she* were the condescending grown-up and the visitor the child.

We others would sit listening in awe-struck admiration of such colossal "cheek," as Harry called it; and yet it was not cheek, either. Fiammetta was absolutely unconscious that there was anything unusual in her conduct, and people generally answered her with such evident enjoyment, that she always escaped the snubbing any other child so aspiring would assuredly have got.

One week a real live lady author came to stay. She took herself and her "works" very seriously, talking about both continually in a fashion I have since learnt to call "sparkling."

Paul christened her "Old Inky" on the spot, for she positively bristled with stylograph pens and bulged with notebooks. Moreover, to our astonishment, she walked up and down the broad walk talking to herself and smoking vast quantities of cigarettes. Mother said the cigarettes were for asthma; but we did not believe that, and came to the conclusion that the fair smoker must be "a wicked Russian Countess in disguise."

It was Fiammetta who promulgated this theory. Russians, for all we knew, might have been of the dullest and most unimpeachable virtue; but Fiammetta was a travelled person, and we took her word for it.

Our "authoress" — they have a different name for workers in her particular field nowadays — was really rather pretty, small and plump, with elaborately-waved fluffy hair, and used three sorts of tongs to arrange it — we saw them on her dressing-table, and longed to try them on our own. She was very smartly dressed, wearing many chains and bracelets, and frilly, rustling petticoats, and she managed a "young contributors' page" in *Comments for County Gentlewomen*.

She told us all about it one evening after tea, and showed us a number in which there was a portrait of the "Snubnosians" (certain hateful children in the neighbourhood, so called because of their noses), standing with their arms twined round each other and their hair all pulled to the front. Every week some "Doris," or "Glwaddys," or "Ivie" figured in that front page, and . . . we felt

we were quite as good-looking as the Snubnosians, anyway.

So we were enchanted with the idea that we should write her a letter all about the Court, and the animals, and how much we enjoyed reading the periodical in question, and how we looked forward to the appearance of our letter.

But when our visitor had departed, and we came to lay our plan before mother — we had to do it in order to get stamps and the photographs — far from smiling upon our scheme, she absolutely forbade the sending of either letter or photograph, and stigmatized the much-vaunted young contributors' page as "vulgar and ridiculous."

We derived some comfort from the reflection that in that case the Snubnosians were both; but the boys, who were quite as unsympathetic as mother, went so far as to call *us* vulgar for ever having entertained the notion. As a last resource, and expecting that there at least we should meet with some sympathy, we laid the matter before father, who was always kind and patient, and never so "down" on one as other people.

He was sitting in a big basket-chair in the arbour, smoking a long pipe with a cherry-wood stem, and reading the *Field*. There was this about father: he always listened, and never interrupted before you were half done, as is the irritating habit of so many people.

"I do so want to be an author," lamented Fiammetta, "and a type of English beauty. She said all the prettiest children are copied into another magazine as types of English beauty."

"Which do you want most," said father, taking his pipe out of his mouth and laying it carefully on the table at his elbow — "which do you want most, to be an author or a type of English beauty?"

Fiammetta sat down on his knee and considered.

"Well, you know," she said at last, "I think an author. You see, you can be a type of English beauty without going into a magazine, but you *must* go into a book of some sort to be an author, must n't you?"

"That's true," said father, taking hold of

her chin and turning her face round towards him. "I question if the best types do 'go into the magazines.' But, you know, you might manage the author business quite easily. Write a book, then you're an author!"

But Fiammetta was not satisfied.

"I don't think that's quite all," she said, knitting her brows, as she always did when doubtful about anything, which, to do Fiammetta justice, was not often. "If no one reads the book but yourself, are you an author then?"

"I'll tell you what," said father: "you write the book, I'll read it, and, what's more, I'll give you half a crown for it if it's good, and I'm positively certain that if your book is read and paid for, that constitutes you an author. There! that will be far better than writing letters for silly magazines that don't pay a halfpenny."

"So it will!" cried Fiammetta, half strangling father in a delighted embrace. "Come along, Janey. I'll begin at once."

"Will father give anybody else half a crown that writes a book, or only Fiammetta?" Paul

inquired anxiously, when we told him the news.

"Oh, anybody, I should think," she replied magnificently; "but it is n't everybody can do it. I'm going to write a real novel with lovers and people in it."

"Does Old Inky write novels," asked Paul dubiously, "or only description things, about people's houses and dogs and bedding-out plants, like that piece she showed us, and ended up with calling that fat little Mrs. Champneys 'the fair Shattylane'? I could n't make that bit out. I always thought a shattylane was a jingly thing ladies hang to their sides; Old Inky had one."

"Oh, my novel won't be a bit like that," said Fiammetta decidedly. "There won't be any real people in it; I shall make them up as I go along."

And so she did. She wrote in the school-room after tea, she wrote in bed before breakfast. Two whole days did she write at odd times with a blunt pencil in an old copy-book. She was frightfully important and mysterious, talking about her "work" as though she

had been Old Inky herself, and would only vouchsafe us the information that the name of her hero and of the book was "Frank Adams."

"I don't think I could like a chap called Frank Adams," Harry grumbled. "It doesn't sound a bit like a hero."

"That's his name," said Fiammetta firmly, "and he is not your sort of hero. *He* doesn't fight and knock people about; he's in love all the time."

"What a juggins!" Harry retorted scornfully; "as if any decent sort of hero had time for that."

"You don't understand," she said loftily. "*This* is a novel for grown-up people. And they like the hero to be in love. I'm sure of it, because I've often looked into works that come from the library, and there's a great deal of 'darlings' and 'beloveds.' I've seen them, I tell you."

When Fiammetta had finished her novel she offered to show it first of all to Paul, as being the reader of most catholic tastes.

"It looks very straight and close," he

objected. "There's no gaps like there is usually in stories. It's like a hist'ry book."

"Oh, the printer always does all that," Fiammetta answered with fine carelessness. "I wrote straight on; it takes much less room."

"It looks dull," he complained. "Don't they talk at all?"

"Oh, lots. It's nearly all talking. You read and see."

But Paul complained that he could not read Fiammetta's writing, and, like many another budding author, she found that her immediate circle betrayed no eager curiosity to peruse her masterpiece.

So she fell back upon me, and I read her novel through, not without considerable difficulty, for Fiammetta scorned the trammels of punctuation; and as for paragraphs, so sparing was she of her paper that the very chapter numbers (there were six in all) were joined on to the story without pause or space.

She plunges into the middle of things at once. "Emily Sophal," engaged to Frank, is lying on a sofa, attended by her mamma, who

is continually "drawing her to her"; then abruptly, "Miss Maldésés wishes to see you Miss Emily said the door are you well enough to see her Miss?" After which surprising feat the door relapses into silence and —

"a tall dark girl now entered the room she was very beautiful her dark eyes being of that rich Italian brown which no other than an Italian can have. Her firm yet sweet mouth and her rich dark complexion and all this was nothing to the graciousness of her whowl aspect for graciousness is very scarce now a days."

The lady with the eyes of "rich Italian brown" is called indiscriminately "Maud" and "Marie," which is somewhat confusing. Frank Adams next appears; he, too, is "tall and dark," but does not say or do much at first, and Chapter I. concludes with a performance on the piano by Maud, *alias* Marie, who played "as no one but an Italian can play, and she was an Italian if ever there was one"; while the author afterward elaborately explains that this surprising young lady's father was a Frenchman, and her mother English.

In Chapter II. we come to what Nurse would have called "the p'int of the stoorey":

"In the gray dawn Frank lay thinking, thinking of Marie. How could he help loving her. He knew that if he threw off Emily and married Marie he would disgrace himself and his family for poor Emily entirely lived upon his love and it would have been murder to her and her mother if he had broken off his engagement. And yet he loved Maud with such a love that no one knew or appreciated but himself Maud was to him everything that was good and true and beautiful and he little knew what a strong passion the young girl was trying to subdue every day gaining some victory over it, or it gaining some victory over her."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! But again the door intervenes, and interrupts Frank's meditations with the abrupt announcement:

"Mr. Frank, would you come at once Miss Emily is taken very ill we fear she is dyeing. A remorseful feeling crept over Frank as he hurried on his clothes and threw himself into his carriage. He thought how before he had seen Marie he had thought Emily everything and now he might be too late to say anything to her Chapter III. Marie

sat looking out at the sunrise from her little room window."

She reflects upon the happiness of Frank and Emily, and then makes breakfast for her father, who has suddenly become "a very poor Italian painter." They discuss their poverty and "sigh gently" a number of times, and Maud decides that she must go out into the world and "work for her living Chapter IV."

In this—"Marie entered the white bedroom of Emily," whose face "was pale, and voice so weak that Marie felt that she could not say with truth she thought she would get over it." Then, with many a "soft sigh," Emily discovers to Maud that Frank loves her—Maud—not Emily!

"I asked him yesterday and he told me and promised if you would consent, to marry you quickly and let me see it done for I shant live long now I know."

Maud is quite overcome by these revelations.

"She had loved Frank in her inmost heart but she had never dreamt of marrying him and it completely stunned her to think that if she liked she might be Mrs. Adams Chapter V."

Frank now performs another gymnastic feat, and appears in Mrs. Sophal's garden at the psychological moment; and

"Emily had learnt the joy of self-denial and was so happy in their happiness that she often said before then she had never been so happy and she daily grew stronger and she lived to a good old age and always Marie's children called her the fairy godmother."

This work impressed me greatly, though I felt sorry for Emily, and could not summon up much enthusiasm for Frank. But father declared it to be worth two half-crowns, and presented Fiammetta with two bright new ones, which she expended at the earliest opportunity in presents for everybody.

"I shan't write another for sometime," she announced in the first flush of her triumph. "My daddy thinks it's a mistake to write too much; besides, it's so much easier to make stories in your head—the spelling and that seems to spoil them, somehow."

CHAPTER XV

FIAMETTA AND THE FRIENDS

With that deep insight which detects
All great things in the small,
And knows how each man's life affects
The spiritual life of all,
He walked by faith and not by sight,
By love and not by law ;
The presence of the wrong or right
He rather felt than saw.

J. G. WHITTIER.

"WHY does Mr. Reuben Page wear such a funny hat?" asked Fiammetta.

"It's a Friend's hat," said father absently, as he stood on the steps looking after his guests as they drove away.

"Has n't he got one of his own?" she said sadly. "Has he given *that* away, too?"

Father laughed, and explained that the broad-brimmed tall hat that excited Fiammetta's amusement was worn by Quakers, or "Friends," as they preferred to be called, of the strict old school to which Reuben Page belonged, whereupon Fiammetta instantly

demanding an explanation of what father meant by "strict old school," and put him through so severe a catechism that it lasted till bed-time, and as we retired Fiammetta confided to me that she was not quite sure whether she "would like to be a Friend after all," which needs explanation.

Father's birthday fell at the end of June, just when the strawberries are at their best, and we liked his birthday better than any one's. In the first place, it was a lunch birthday, which, being interpreted, means that he "kept it" in the middle of the day, and we were all present. Secondly, it was always fine on father's birthday, even in the wettest of summers; and, thirdly, certain old friends who lived right on the other side of the county invariably came to spend it with him.

Now, these people were Quakers, and Reuben Page kept strictly to the speech and dress of his forebears. We always felt a little thrill of excitement when, on shaking hands with mother, he would say, "How art thou, Jane Staniland, and thy comely young

family?" Similarly, he always addressed the stiff and stately Lady Greatorex (Sir William's wife) as "Dorothea Greatorex," and she seemed to like it.

Friend Reuben Page was a very remarkable man, a most learned archæologist, a great linguist, a violent politician. He would have gone to the stake with the cheerfullest serenity in support of the least of his convictions, and yet he was like a child in the eagerness of his enthusiasms, had a keen sense of humour, a pretty wit, and a delightfully infectious chuckling laugh. In appearance he was slight and frail, with brilliant eyes under bushy eyebrows, set in a thin, ascetic face. His whole aspect gave the impression that bodily things played but a small part in his scheme of life. With him came his wife—a sweet lady, whose whole time was spent in oiling the wheels of life for her busy husband, and in taking care that he did not forget his meals—and three of his children—two boys and a girl of about our own ages. They were great favourites of ours, these Pages, for they were "ready for anything," especially of a

lawless and adventurous character, and in spite, or perhaps because, of their exceedingly strict upbringing there was a freshness about all their ideas and doings that we failed to find in the rest of our contemporaries.

Fiammetta had never seen them before, and was greatly excited by Friend Reuben's mode of speech. She listened all lunch-time, instead of talking herself, as she usually did, and the moment lunch was over she seized upon Anne to exclaim enthusiastically:

"I do so like the way your father speaks. It's like 'Aucassin and Nicolette,' and King Arthur, and all sorts of nice things. I think I'd like to be a Friend myself and speak like that. Why don't you?"

Anne grinned scornfully and sceptically. "Oh, *would* you?" she said; "then, I don't agree with you at all. I don't care for folks theeing and thouing me; I like to be called Miss Page."

"Sweet Anne Page," corrected Paul in dulcet tones. Paul, who had again been surreptitiously reading the "Merry Wives," had christened her "Sweet Anne Page"; he had

the greatest admiration for her, and insisted on staying with us instead of going off with the three bigger boys to "shake down the strawberries" in violent sport.

"No, nor that either," said Anne with great decision. "Miss Page is what I prefer."

"Anybody can be Miss anything," Fiammetta objected. "It's much more distinguished to be *unlike* other people."

Anne looked at her with amused blue eyes. She was a tall, fair girl, with the wonderful clear colouring that seems the heritage of all Quakeresses of long descent. Then she said importantly:

"If you had a father as unlike other people as mine you'd be glad to be less distinguished and more ordinary."

"My father *is* distinguished," said Fiammetta proudly. "He's a poet."

"Oh, I should n't mind that so much," Miss Page replied tolerantly. "I don't suppose he stops at the corners of the streets to say his poetry and collect a crowd; but my father is always finding marks and things made by the Romans. Do you *like* the Romans?" she asked

suddenly. No one seemed sure as to her exact sentiments towards the Romans, so she continued: "And father's always so eager, he *must* tell somebody — anybody who happens to be passing — and one person stops, and another person stops, and father forgets everything except about the old mark, or whatever it is. He's so *eager*," she repeated, "and so frightfully interested in such an awful lot of things."

"Oh, brother, the gods were good to you!" chanted Paul with curious aptness. He was for ever making queer quotations, and we none of us knew where he got them — often from poems and things he had no sort of business to read.

"Whatever does Paul mean?" asked Anne, standing still in the middle of the path to stare at him. "What a silly little boy he is!"

"I know," said Fiammetta quickly. "He's quite right. That's why people stop and listen to your father. He's a dear; I like him."

"Oh, he's a tremendous dear!" said Anne, with a world of love in her voice, "but he does

want a lot of looking after. He forgets his meals, and sometimes he gives away ours if we don't watch him — cakes and things, I mean."

"But who does he give them to?" Fiammetta asked, too interested to think of such a triviality as grammar.

"Well, now, I'll tell you. The other day, it was John's birthday, and we had some children for the afternoon; we didn't ask you because it's such a way. Well, tea was set in the dining-room, and there was a big birthday-cake and lots of plates of nice little cakes too. But when we came in from the garden there was nothing left on the table but the big cake and the bread-and-butter. *All* the little ones were gone — vanished — and *there* were the empty plates!" And Anne paused dramatically, opening both eyes and mouth very wide to emphasize the tragedy.

"But how did you know it was him?" asked Paul.

"We did n't, not at first. . . . We could n't imagine what had happened; we thought it was thieves. Even mother and nurse thought

so, till presently in comes father, and when he saw us all standing round the table so solemn he laughed and laughed, and then he said something about a lot of poor boys — factory boys — picnicking out on the common, and he'd given them the cakes *because* they'd never had such cakes before, never seen such cakes; he did n't even think they had birth-days." Again Anne paused significantly, and held up her empty hands, palms outwards. "That's father all over," she concluded.

"I like that," Fiammetta said softly.

"Well, we did n't," said Anne decidedly. "They were our cakes. She's a Papist, is n't she?" Anne continued, abruptly changing the subject and pointing at Fiammetta.

"What's a Papist?" that lady demanded before she would admit the soft impeachment.

"Oh, *I* don't know," said Anne wearily — "not exactly. They're always burning people and ——"

"I *don't* burn people," Fiammetta interrupted indignantly; then, with a guilty recollection of the school-treat: "At least, not intentionally."

"And they fasten people up in walls," Anne continued, taking no notice of the interruption, "and then they go and put them in stained-glass windows. You're rather like a person in a stained-glass window, so I thought you might be a Papist."

"I don't understand," Fiammetta said dubiously, not quite sure whether a compliment was intended or not. "*Who* is put in the stained-glass windows—the burners or the people they burnt?"

"Oh, both, I think," said Anne, with a fine impartiality; "only the Papists were the wickedest—the others were good."

"*All* good?" Paul inquired.

"Oh, I think so," said Anne hastily, with, however, just a shade of doubt in her voice. "Shall we play at martyrs?"

"Who'll be the martyr?" Fiammetta asked anxiously, it being a rôle that did not commend itself to her.

"Oh, you, of course! We'll put you to the torture to make you recant: we won't hurt you really, and you must be quite firm. Janey and Paul and I will be the inquisitors."

"I *should n't* be firm if you hurt me," said Fiammetta decidedly. "I think I'd rather be an inquisitor; you'd make a very nice martyr, you know."

"Oh no, I should n't! Father says we can't all be martyrs, and I'm one of the can'ts."

After some further discussion, it turned out that none of us just then felt called upon to enact "witnesses in blood to the faith"; so the game fell through. Perhaps we had eaten too many strawberries; but I know it ended in our peacefully playing at "meeting," Anne being our instructress, and both Fiammetta and Paul were "moved" to address the congregation.

When we joined the others for tea on the lawn (we all had tea with father on his birthday), Fiammetta went and stood in front of Friend Reuben Page, who was, I remember, discoursing about the Anglo-Saxons and throwing himself into their attitudes. Fiammetta was no longer pale, as she had been when she first came; her cheeks were rosy and her eyes very bright. As she stood before our guest

she seemed a patch of brilliant colour, in perfect keeping with the gay green of the lawn, her blue frock so intensely blue, her hair so bright in the sunshine.

"Do you think I should make a nice Friend?" she asked him eagerly, clasping her hands in an entreating way she had.

Friend Reuben Page detached his mind from the Anglo-Saxons and looked at her kindly under his thick eyebrows, holding out his hand and saying:

"An excellent friend, I should think. Wilt thou be one of mine?"

Fiammetta put her clasped hands into his, just as they were. "But I mean a Friend like you — one of your people: a *real* Friend."

Reuben Page looked across at father, and laughed and shook his head. Then he said something about the Renaissance, which we none of us understood.

"Be thyself, my dear maid," he said to her; "thou art very well as thou art, and be not too ready to run after every new thing." Then he loosed her hands, saying gently: "Be not too eager."

“Why, that’s just what she says you are!” Fiammetta exclaimed in surprise, when Anne, with an extremely swift and dextrous movement, tripped her up, and the continuity of her remarks was lost in the general commotion.

By the time tea was over she had become an ardent student of the Anglo-Saxons, especially of their attitudes, as represented by Friend Reuben Page, and arose early next morning to practise them in front of the glass.

“I don’t care much about being a martyr,” she said to me, “or a deaconess; I shall be just myself, as he said — till I’m somebody else. It would be dull to be one person *all* the time, would n’t it?”

CHAPTER XVI

FIAMMETTA MEETS A FALCONER

Me thinks these millane bells do sound too full.

Old Play.

IT was Sunday afternoon, and Fiammetta, father, and I were sitting on a tree-trunk under one of the big elms in the paddock. We had as usual been "round the place." Paul and Harry had walked over to the home farm, taking all the dogs with them; but father, who was very hot — big people always do seem very hot in summer — had found a convenient tree-trunk, and proposed that we should sit and rest awhile.

The air was still, and a thousand summer sounds seemed each one clear and distinct from the other. Fiammetta and I were well content to sit in quiet, lolling against father, who sat between us, as he smoked his Sunday cigar. Such good-smelling cigars father smoked! On week-days a pipe sufficed him; but it always seemed to me that the Sunday

afternoon cigars were a sort of compensation for the black coat he wore with such plain discomfort in the morning.

"I like it here," Fiammetta said presently, with a little sigh of satisfaction; "there are such nice noises. Listen to that bird up there; it sings just like a little bell."

As she spoke father leant forward, looking up into the blue above us with the keen, strong gaze of the countryman when there is anything strange either afield or in the air. He sat perfectly still for a minute; then put his hand behind his ear and listened again. Sure enough there was the sound of a bell — a clear silvery sound — as a partridge ran across the grass with its curious bumpetty gait, half run half flight; and that other bird, so high as to look quite small, though wide-winged, beating up and up just over it in wide circles till it was a mere speck. Father whipped out his little field-glass.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed; "it's one of Major Vernon's peregrine falcons escaped. I can see the jesses on her legs. *That* accounts for the mobbing of the rooks last night. I

suppose she must have that partridge, and I must try and hood her. Wait here, you children, and mark when she stoops. Don't move — mark the place. No, you probably won't, though. You go, Janey; run for all you are worth and fetch me the snare, swivel, and hood hanging up on the right-hand side of the fireplace in the gunroom. Bustle about, now!"

I hustled, but rather unwillingly, for I wanted to see the sport. When Harry and I were quite small father had kept a few falcons, led thereto by the enthusiasm of a distant and delightful neighbour, who was almost world-famed for the beauty of his birds and his exhaustive knowledge, both historical and practical, of the sport. But after a year or two father gave it up; he always kept, however, his cadge, his lure, bells, jesses, leash, and hood. As I ran I met the boys coming to find us.

"One of Major Vernon's falcons," I panted, "in the paddock — going to stoop — partridge — father's going to snare her."

"I'll fetch them, Janey," cried Harry,

darting off like an arrow from a bow.
"You're pumped. What a lark!"

Paul started to run in the opposite direction, and I waited till Harry should come in sight. He was always good-natured, was Harry, when there was anything to be done.

In an incredibly short time he reappeared with hood, leash, and snare in his hand. There was never any difficulty in finding any of father's things, and Harry had remembered something father had not asked for—the gauntleted left-hand glove that hung with the other things. As soon as I saw him, I too began to run, but he passed me before I reached father, who, with glasses glued to his eyes, was standing in the middle of the paddock, looking up.

Nobody spoke. Fiammetta, trembling with excitement, stood with head thrown back, and wide, strained brown eyes gazing up into the cloudless sky. Paul, his legs far apart, his hands in his pockets, watched father.

"Aah!" said father at last, and boxed his glass, dropping it into his capacious coat-pocket, "there goes my partridge."

Not three hundred yards from us the falcon stooped. A silvery sound, clearer and nearer, a puff of brown feathers as she struck her prey, then silence, and, as the grass was very long just there, nothing to be seen.

"Did you mark?" father asked of Harry, who was standing beside him. Harry nodded, but did not move.

"I believe she is hungry. We'll try and snare her presently with a full crop. You others stay where you are. Harry can come with me."

It was a hard command. But the children of sportsmen early learn to do what they are told — at least, in sporting matters. Fiammetta seized me by the arm, whispering as she danced up and down in her excitement:

"Oh, I do hope they'll catch it! If they do we are to take it back to Major Vernon to-morrow; and Mr. Staniland says he'll take you and me, and you can drive, and we'll have lunch with Major Vernon, and he'll be awfully glad to have his hawk back again. Hawks don't mind men, your father says. Isn't it funny?"

Paul and I did not answer: we watched the other two, but the grass in the far field — a second crop — was too long to see much. We waited an age, for father and Harry, as it seemed, stood perfectly still for minutes at a time. At last, and suddenly, father gave the falconer's holloa, and held out his gloved hand, and to our immense surprise the falcon dashed up on to his wrist, and allowed herself to be hooded without a struggle.

It was a triumphant procession that set out for home and tea — father with the hooded falcon firmly leashed to his wrist, Harry bearing the remains (very small remains they were) of the poor partridge, and the rest of us all talking at once — a home-coming pleasant to see.

"It's been an awfully decent Sunday," sighed Harry that evening. "I wish trained hawks would come oftener."

"Father says he'll ask Major Vernon to come and fly his falcons over our fields after the first," said Paul, "and we shall all go out with him. I don't see why the girls should go to-morrow instead of us, do you?"

"Major Vernon and I have not met," said Fiammetta, with her most grown-up air. "I'm sure he'll be pleased to see me, because I saw his falcon first."

Major Vernon lived twelve miles away, right on the other side of the hill; but father thought nothing of driving a dozen or fifteen miles to see a friend. A good pair of horses, a light four-wheeled dog-cart, a long rest when you got there, and a cool drive home when the shadows were growing long and golden light shone in between the trees — that was father's notion of a day's pleasuring, and I still think it a very good one. Bicycle and motor-car are all very well, but the silent speed of the one and the noisy rattle and rush of the other can surely not compare with the companionable click of a horse's hoofs upon the stones — that soothing, rhythmic beat of a well-matched pair upon the good highroad. Besides, there still exist people who prefer the scent of honeysuckle unmixed with the smell of petrol. Anyway, I have tried all three modes of progression, and I still like father's way best, especially as

on this occasion I was allowed to drive directly we had gone through Garchester. I sat on the box with father on the seat at my side, the hooded falcon leashed to his wrist, while Fiammetta and Greenwood sat behind.

We could never persuade Fiammetta to try to drive anything. She was not nervous in carriages, as are some town-bred people, who watch a horse's ears like signals, and are ready to throw themselves out of the lowest pony phaeton if the poor beast so much as flicks off a fly; but she was quite content to sit and be driven, whereas all of us, from the time we could sit at all, itched to handle the ribbons, and worried the authorities till we were allowed to do so.

Fiammetta seemed to regard all animals in a detached, impersonal fashion; horses or cows, sheep or dogs, barn-door fowls or pheasants, were all alike to her. She thought them pretty or useful, as the case might be: she would not have hurt one of them for the world; but she could never understand, and we seemed incapable of explaining to her, why horses and dogs are so much nearer to

us than other creatures. When, as we drove through the little Cotteswold town near which Major Vernon lived, and father said, "I'm glad we got this falcon; they're wife and children and all his relations to him," she leant over the back seat and asked in a puzzled voice: "Does he love his birds so much then—as much as people?"

"A good deal more than some people," father, answered, chuckling. "There are folks who don't like it when a strange hawk makes a meal off their partridges; but if they harm the hawk—well, Major Vernon doesn't like them much."

"But," she argued, "they are such cruel birds. It says so in all the story-books. Look what that one did to the poor little partridge."

"You tell Major Vernon what you think of his hawks, and see what he says. Mind that gatepost, Janey; and for God's sake don't cut the turf at the side! You're a bad hand at corners—always were."

It was seldom that father waxed profane, but to make wheel ruts in another person's

shaven turf was an unforgivable offence, and I came near to doing it just then. However, I just cleared the grass at the side and drove smartly up Major Vernon's drive, feeling most pleased with myself.

It was a queer battlemented house called "The Keep"; a wide, beautifully-kept lawn stretched its gracious length in front of the house, and it differed from other lawns in that there was upon it a row of wooden blocks, and upon every block but one sat a hooded hawk.

Major Vernon stood on the steps to give us welcome as I drew up at the door, and it was characteristic of him and of the fast-vanishing type he represented, that he made no reference to the lost falcon till he had himself lifted Fiammetta and me down from the dog-cart, asked after mother, slapped father on the shoulder, exclaimed how glad he was to see us, and despatched Greenwood under the charge of his own coachman to put up the horses. Then he hurried us into the cool, dark hall, exclaiming how hungry we must be after such a drive.

He was a spare, elderly gentleman with

trim white beard and moustache, ruddy, regularly-featured face, lit by gray eyes with that keen long-distance look in them only seen in the eyes of those who live much out of doors. He wore a tweed Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers and thick, square-toed, serviceable boots. But it was his manner that was so unique. It had that wonderful, intangible, *welcoming* quality that is, alas! becoming so rare. He was so gay and plainly glad to see us that we all felt cheered and exhilarated, and in some strange, subtle fashion *praised*, merely in shaking hands with him.

Meanwhile the falcon, hearing his voice, fluttered and struggled, and father unwound the leash, saying:

"Here's your truant, Vernon; she is a beauty, and perfectly managed."

"Iseulte, you naughty beauty, I thought you had gone for good; four whole days have you been wandering. I could have cried for joy when I got your letter this morning, Staniland; she's only just out of her training. Of course, it was wood-pigeons as usual; but if she had been caught killing partridges on

the land of some curmudgeons we know of, not all the bells of India would have saved her. Ay, and they would hardly have given me the ones she wears from her corpse. Sweet lady! Here, take her!" And Major Vernon turned to a man who was waiting on the steps, his falconer, as we learned afterwards. "And now these young ladies must go upstairs and take off their hats, and then lunch."

He fondled the pretty hooded bird as he gave it to his man, and Fiammetta, standing on the bottom step of the staircase, waited to watch him, saying:

"Do you love it very much?"

He turned instantly at the sound of the clear little voice, and I saw in his eyes the strange, startled expression of pleasure that people so often wore when they realised Fiammetta for the first time.

The hall was large and old, a study in black and white, all dark wood and white stone: table and benches heavy and black with age, many heads and horns and curious weapons on the walls, the staircase white stone, as are so many of the Garchester staircases; and

Fiammetta, in her blue gown and flat blue cap, with brilliant eyes and hair, so slim of body and so finely made, looked quaintly in harmony with her surroundings.

Major Vernon crossed the hall and came towards her, smiling as he came.

"Yes, I am very proud of Iseulte; she has every good gift—speed, skill, perseverance, docility, and tameness. Don't you think she is a nice falcon yourself?"

I waited a little anxiously for Fiammetta's answer. The boys had talked of nothing but the killing powers of falcons and hawks last night, and Fiammetta had asseverated with considerable vehemence her opinion that they were cruel, horrid birds.

"It is a very pretty bird, with a very pretty name," she answered diplomatically, "and I am quite sure it is very fond of you." (We never *could* teach Fiammetta to call animals anything but "it.") "Did you know I found it first? I heard the little bells ever so high in the air, and thought it was singing."

"Then it really is to you that I owe my falcon. How delightful that is! She will

have an added value henceforth." And Major Vernon bowed over the little hand Fiammetta held out to him.

As we climbed the wide staircase together, followed by Major Vernon's stately housekeeper, Fiammetta squeezed my arm, whispering:

"Is n't he a darling? Does n't he make you feel a Princess?"

A bow drawn at a venture, but she had hit the gold. I feel quite sorry for future generations of little girls, who can, I fear, never meet any Major Vernons. That entirely charming manner of his was the product of a less hurried age than ours. It was the outcome of a consensus of opinion of generations of gentlefolks, who deemed that the first and essential quality of gentleness was pleasantness, and in no circumstances does the gentleness of a gentleman more markedly betray itself than in his manner to little girls. There are people, quite good and estimable in other respects, who reserve for children an attitude of mind and bearing that irresistibly reminds one of the elder sister celebrated

by the late Mr. William Black. He was living in a semi-detached house, where the walls were thin, and every morning he would hear the eldest sister call to the younger members of the family: "Now, you horrid little things, make haste and say your nasty little prayers."

But with Major Vernon, although one might be conscious that there still were a few tedious years to be bridged over before one became a noble and beautiful lady (beautiful, certainly), still, the assurance remained that such one was going to be, and that he fully realised the inevitability of this apotheosis.

We had everything for lunch that the heart of child could covet, and after lunch he showed us all his falcons and hawks, and told us interesting things about that "noble sport for nobles": of how King John, who, whatever other faults he may have had, was a great sportsman, sent his falconer to our very town of Garchester 'for the purpose of moulting or mewing his falcons'; and how the Sheriff was commanded by royal rescript "to provide proper food, lodging, and maintenance for him, his men, and his hawks."

He further promised that a young eyas hawk then at "hack" should be called after Fiammetta, because her eyes were "much the same colour."

As we drove home in the soft sweet evening light, father turned to Fiammetta, asking:

"Well, what of those cruel birds? I noticed you didn't broach the subject with Major Vernon."

Fiammetta smiled back at him a little conscious, superior smile, saying:

"What was the use? He loves them, and he was so kind to us. They *are* cruel all the same, but it would have hurt him if he'd known I'd thought so, and he is much too nice and dear to hurt."

Father laughed and murmured something about "very woman," and I was irresistibly reminded of Mrs. Dutton, who, when she did anything—generally something kind—of which she knew Dutton would disapprove, would sedulously conceal the same from him, remarking cheerfully:

"Bless his 'eart! What a man don't know can't worrit 'im!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE FAIR

Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.

Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

R. B.

MISS GOODLAKE having just departed for her holiday, and the French lady who was to take her place not having arrived, we persuaded father to take Fiammetta and me as well as the boys to the "Mop," — the Garsetshire name for Fair. Of course, the carriage could not go down the street where the fair was held; but father had to go to a bank hard by, and, bidding us all wait upon the steps till he came out, sent Dutton round to the Bell to put up the horses.

A noisy crowd surged at the foot of the steps, and in the midst of it a man with a voice like a fog-horn proclaimed the all-curing properties of some pills he was selling. Any sort of crowd had an irresistible attraction for Paul and Fiammetta, and away they ran down

the steps, and disappeared into the crowd of listening yokels before we could stop them. Harry and I, knowing full well they had no sort of business to have gone, had to wait at the top of the steps for father, and when at last he did come they were nowhere to be seen.

It seems that long before they had tired of the quack doctor, Fiammetta and Paul found themselves carried along against their will by the moving mass of people, past stalls whereon were displayed an infinite variety of glittering articles they would fain have stopped to inspect, till they found breathing-space in front of a large booth which was approached by wooden steps and a platform, on which two beautiful beings clad in tights and spangles paraded, beating on drums to attract the passers-by.

“We were n’t quite sure whether they were ladies or gentlemen or mermaids,” Paul said afterwards; “but they looked awfully nice.”

I must mention that from end to end of the fair the noise was simply terrific. Drums, trumpets, steam bands, sirens, hurdy-gurdies,

banged and tooted and strummed without cessation, while loud above the general din bawled the voices of those who announced the excellence of their various shows or the unrivalled cheapness of the contents of their stalls.

But Paul and Fiammetta were entirely undismayed by the general din. They had come out in search of "life," and they found it with a vengeance. A little breathless, perhaps, tumbled, hot, and dusty, they paused in the open space before the waxwork show, to find themselves standing next-door to a little girl about Fiammetta's size, who carried a large and heavy baby. It was a fat, contented baby, spreading and "lolloping" all over its poor little nurse, till it threatened to extinguish her altogether. Her thin legs, terminating in elastic-sided boots several sizes too large for her, trembled under the burden held by her skinny arms with the despairing clutch of great fatigue. Her quaint little face, crowned by a battered, brimless hat, peered above the serene moon countenance of her charge, looking only half about its size.

She stared at Paul and Fiammetta; they stared at her, and the drums ceased for a moment.

"Be you a-goin' in?" she asked presently.

"Oh yes," Fiammetta answered, with the slightly *blasé* air that we found so impressive; "we're going to see everything presently, but there's no hurry; we like to look about us first."

"Law!" exclaimed the little girl, apostrophizing no one in particular, "ain't she bought the street, now?"

"Aren't you going in?" Paul asked.

"No, I bain't," the little girl replied with sad decision, as she shifted the heavy baby to her other arm. "'T ain't for the likes of me to go to no waxworks. I got to mind this 'ere hinfant — that's wot I got to do. I ain't got no business 'ere reely, but I could n't yer all the screechin' and 'ollering and kip away — that I could n't."

Paul and Fiammetta looked at one another. It suddenly struck them both that they had no business there, either.

"Do you have to carry that baby all day

long?" Fiammetta asked. "Is it your baby — your mother's, I mean?"

"'E's my haunt's baby, and I'm a-mindin' of 'im till I be growed big enough for to take a sitooation. She do give Oi my keep for mindin' of 'im."

The little girl rocked her body to and fro as she spoke, tottering under her load, and Fiammetta was seized by an immense compassion.

"Is your aunt kind to you?" she asked.

"Mindlin'," the little girl answered wearily. "She 'its me about a goodish bit, but she ain't nothin' to huncle w'en 'e's drunk."

Fiammetta and Paul looked horror-struck.

"Would you like," Fiammetta began very loudly and distinctly, for the drums had begun again — "would you like to go in and see the waxworks with us? We've got money enough."

Once more the little girl changed the arm that bore the baby, almost losing her balance in the attempt.

"I don't think," she said sadly, "as I could get up them steps with this 'ere. 'T is as much as I can do to carry 'im on the flat, let alone

small 'ills. I 'd admire to see them there wax himages — rippers and piseners and throttlers there be, hall the murderers there've bin for the last ten year, they do say that nat'ral they'd frighten you to death. . . ."

Again Paul and Fiammetta exchanged glances, while the minder of her aunt's baby gazed into space in rapt contemplation.

"I don't think we'd better go in till father comes," Paul shouted above the general din. "He'd not know where we were. But couldn't *you* hold the baby for her while she just had a look in? — I've got twopence — then we can wait here till father comes."

"Now, that there little boy do talk sense, 'e do," the small nursemaid cried eagerly. "I'll sample them murderers before you could say 'knife' if I 'aven't got no 'eavy hinfant to 'inder me. . . . 'E's a good contented choild, 'e is. 'E don't mind 'oo 'olds 'im if they 'olds 'im comfortable."

"You won't be long, will you?" Fiammetta said in rather a trembling voice. "I'm not used to holding babies, and it mightn't be happy."

"Law bless you! 'e'll be as 'appy as a king, 'e will; and if 'e 'as the 'iccups, you jest pats 'im on the back like this 'ere."

With considerable difficulty the exchange of nurses was effected, and when at last the baby was arranged in Fiammetta's somewhat uncertain grasp, his late guardian remarked reproachfully:

"Well, you do be a'k'ard, to be sure; and a great girl like you, too, as ought to know better! Mind as 'e don't fly in a passion, 'cos then 'e goes all stiff, and throws 'isself about something dreadful."

Fiammetta began to repent her of her good-nature, but Paul had already handed over the twopence, and the large elastic-sided boots skipped up the steps and vanished into the society of the murderers with the utmost speed in a crowd of other sightseers. Fiammetta found the baby much more difficult to nurse than the very largest doll she had ever tackled. She tried at first to walk about with it, as there was a momentary clearance in front of the waxwork show; but she very soon tired of that, for the day was hot, dust

was plentiful, and people stared at her. Paul stuck by her faithfully, but he, too, began to be uncomfortably conscious that their appearance was attracting attention.

"I do hope she won't be long," Fiammetta gasped, as she pulled up at the foot of the steps, after a somewhat unsteady promenade to the end of the booth and back. "It's a frightfully heavy baby, and it doesn't seem to sit still with me like it did with her. Oh, Paul, I do believe it's going *stiff*, like she said. Oh, Paul, *do* something; don't let it cry!"

Paul went round behind Fiammetta and poked his finger into the moon face hanging over her shoulder, remarking, "Sweet, sweet," as though it had been a canary. This evidently displeased it, for the whimper became a roar, the wriggle a struggle, and Fiammetta, losing both grasp and presence of mind at the same moment, let her charge slip from her left arm, only recovering sufficiently to clasp it tightly round the body with both arms, squeezing it against her, while Paul squeezed too in his efforts to prevent its falling alto-

gether — a most uncomfortable position for any self-respecting baby, as its vociferous outcry proclaimed.

With Paul's assistance the baby was hoisted up again on to Fiammetta's left arm. A kindly matron in the crowd presented it with a "fairing" in the shape of a sponge-cake "finger" tied up in muslin, and, thus comforted, baby and children settled themselves down once more to await the return of his proper guardian with what patience they could muster.

Fiammetta tried sitting in a very small corner of the bottom step, but the spangled guardians of the entrance caught sight of her and drove her away.

"Paul, could you hold the baby a bit?" she asked presently. "My arms feel as if they would drop off."

"I could *hold* it," Paul said, measuring the baby with a careful eye, "but I could n't hold it comfortable; I should break its back or something. But I'll try, if you like."

"Oh no!" Fiammetta cried in horror. "I promised to take care of it, and I will, but I

think I shall die if I have to hold it much longer. There must be a great many murderers in there, as she's such a time. Do you think she'll be grateful, Paul, when she comes back?"

"No," said Paul decidedly; "not a bit. Other children are never grateful; only dogs are grateful."

Paul spoke with authority, as one who had weighed both kinds, and found humanity sadly wanting.

"Paul," Fiammetta said a moment later, "I think my arms will fall off. I can feel them coming out."

Paul looked at Fiammetta in great anxiety. Her nose was bedewed with perspiration, and she certainly looked very worn and anxious. He gazed wildly round for assistance; there was no hope of seeing anyone but the ever-moving surrounding crowd, and father had not yet come in sight, when, suddenly not three yards from him, he caught sight of flying ribbons and an upright soldierly back in uniform that seemed familiar, and, squeezing under the elbows of intervening neigh-

bours, he laid hold of the coat belonging to the straight back and gave it a vigorous pull.

"Ah! would you?" cried a wrathful voice; and Sergeant caught one of Paul's hands in a masterful grip, under the impression that he had captured a pickpocket.

"Good gracious, Master Paul, whatever are you doing here?" he cried in astonishment.

Paul dragged at his hand, exclaiming: "Oh, come quick to Fiammetta; her arms are dropping off; they'll come right out if she holds that baby any more. Oh, come! she's close by here."

More bewildered than ever, Sergeant permitted himself to be dragged in the direction Paul desired, and in another minute he had relieved Fiammetta of the baby, which had begun to cry again, for the "soother" had been dropped and trodden under foot.

The crowd that had surrounded Sergeant now encompassed the children, and everybody listened with comments to their tale of woe, as to how they had become possessed of the baby.

"I can't stand here carrying this baby," Sergeant exclaimed when he had grasped the situation. "I'm on duty recruiting; we must get hold of that little girl."

Sergeant's position was unenviable in the extreme. Every moment the crowd round them increased; so tall a man in uniform carrying a baby naturally attracted considerable attention. Yokels found with delight that they could chaff him with impunity, for, hampered as he was with a baby in his arms, and two children clinging to his legs, he could in no wise settle matters after his usual fashion.

Father was naturally much annoyed that Paul and Fiammetta should have started by themselves; we followed them as quickly as was consistent with a thorough hunt through the crowd on either side as we went. Luckily, Garsetshire peasantry are, as a rule, short, and both father and Sergeant over six feet, so that it came about that by-and-by they saw each other over the heads of the crowd.

"Whatever can Sergeant Barlow be doing

with that baby?" father said anxiously. "I hope there has n't been an accident."

Just then Sergeant caught sight of father. In a moment he had handed the baby to a woman in the crowd, and held up Paul over the heads of the people to show father that his missing lambs were found.

As we reached Sergeant and the truants, the baby's guardian was seen slowly descending the steps, with the expression of one who with difficulty tears herself away from an entrancing spectacle.

"I ain't seen 'em 'alf properly," she remarked coolly as she rejoined Fiammetta—Sergeant had got the baby again—"I thought as 'ow that cherub might be frettin' for 'is Nanna; but 'e seems contented enough"—looking up admiringly at Sergeant. "Shall us go down the fair a bit?"

Sergeant shook his head and handed her the baby. "You go back out of this," he said severely. "It's no place for a young baby, is n't Mop, especially when another baby's set to take care on it. You've no business to leave the baby with strangers, neither.

How did you know the young lady would n't go off with it altogether?"

The little girl grinned as once more she shouldered her burden. "*She* would n't do nothin' like that 'ere," she said scornfully; "she be that simple and iggorant, she would n't 'urt a vloi;" and without another word she marched away out of the fair as she was bid.

"Father," said Paul loudly and distinctly, "it's our turn to go and see the murderers now, is n't it?"

"I should n't take 'em, sir," Sergeant interposed eagerly. "'T is n't a sight for the likes of them."

"She said it was n't for the likes of her," Paul argued, "but she went."

However, none of us went, but we saw and did much else, and Harry won so many cocoanuts that he had to give them back to the woman, for he could n't carry them himself, and none of us would.

"Fancy," said Fiammetta to me that night as she sat on her bed taking off her stockings, "Paul was quite right: she was n't grateful; but I'm glad she went all the same, for some-

how Mr. Staniland didn't seem a bit angry with us for going off when he heard about the baby, so it was a good thing, after all; only why did she speak as if I only did it from stupidity, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XVIII

PAUL AND THE ANARCHIST

Antic in girlish broideries
And skirts, and silly shoes with straps,
And a broad-ribanded leghorn, he walks.

W. E. HENLEY.

“**I** LIKE French people,” said Fiammetta;
“they are gay and cheerful.”

“Well, I am sure you can have this one
all to yourself,” said Harry gloomily. “*We*
don’t want her!”

“Oh, I don’t fancy she’ll bother much,”
Paul remarked cheerfully. “Look at that
Frowlin we had at Christmas: *she* always
slept all afternoon; and as for German—
why, she was so keen to learn English we
never had no trouble at all.”

“I can’t think why, when Miss Goodlake
goes for her holiday, some foreign person
should always come. Why can’t we be left
in peace?” Harry went on in a grumbling
tone. “They never like us, and we never

like them, and just as we've got a bit used to them they go away. What *ever* is the use of it?"

Miss Goodlake had that morning gone for her holiday, and was, according to custom, to be replaced in a day or two by what nurse called "one of them their furrineers."

Mother fondly imagined that by importing these strangers she improved our "modern languages," but so far as I remember, except in one instance, nothing of the kind happened. Father firmly refused to speak any language but his own, so at lunch all attempts at *Parlez français* or *doytch*, as Paul called it with a beautiful Garsetshire "oi," were abandoned, and I do believe the strangers enjoyed that meal. Governesses always adored father: he was so kind and polite, and so anxious that they should have enough to eat. Even the most forlorn and phlegmatic of "furrineers" cheered up when father leant across the table with his genial "Glass of wine with you, Frowlin!" (father, and Paul, and nurse firmly adhered to their own conception of how German vowels should be pro-

nounced), and even if she were a teetotaler she became more approachable.

When the new mademoiselle did arrive we could n't quite tell what to make of her. She was assuredly French, but she was neither gay nor cheerful. She was little and thin and sallow, with a quiet, repressed sort of manner and a low voice, but in her great dark eyes there was a smouldering fire that warned an observant child that she was not to be trifled with; and, most wonderful of all, she insisted on our talking French. It was surprising, it was unpleasant, it was totally without precedent. All the other "madduls," as Paul called them, seemed so anxious to learn English that they were forever asking *us* the name of this and that in English; but this one was always *telling* us the name of things in French, and had a disagreeable habit of remembering what she had told us, and of expecting us to do the same. Fiammetta chattered to her easily enough, and was, I think, rather surprised that Mademoiselle Vizille pulled her up so often on the score of bad grammar, or what she called "French of

the nursery." Fiammetta loved to show her superiority to the rest of us by gabbling very fast, and was distinctly hurt when mademoiselle pointed out several mistakes of construction in her remarks, and concluded her homily with the aphorism: "La qualité est préférable à la quantité."

Mademoiselle herself always spoke very slowly and distinctly, and waited for Harry and me most patiently when we tried to talk. She never laughed at us, but then she never laughed at anything, and was so plainly consumed with anxiety that we should really learn something that it seemed almost cruel to disoblige her. She did not seem to like any of us, even Fiammetta, although we were never actively naughty, being much too afraid of her to play any monkey tricks.

Paul at first seemed the most hopeless of us all, for he persisted in trying to speak French with a Garsetshire accent. He had no wish to speak French at all, but if such a course were necessary, then he determined to follow it in a new and original fashion. Mademoiselle Vizille would stare at him with puzzled,

mournful eyes, patiently and persistently correcting his deplorable accent, and it really seemed for some time as if, in spite of her conscientious anxiety to improve him, that he was incorrigible. When, one wet afternoon, she was seized by an inspiration, and began to read poetry aloud to us, Paul was playing with his soldiers in the corner, quite quietly. She did not call him or tell him to come and listen. It was to Fiammetta and me that she addressed herself. She had a nice voice, and French, when regarded dispassionately and not as a lesson, especially when it falls into rhythmic lines, is really rather a pretty language — at least, it sounded pretty as she read it.

Before she had been reading two minutes, Paul scrambled to his feet; then slowly, as though drawn by some irresistible attraction, crept nearer and nearer, till he stood close against her knees. She did not look up or take the smallest notice of him. When she finished reading — it was quite a short little poem by Victor Hugo — Paul put his hand over hers that held the book.

"Could I learn to say all that like you?" he asked eagerly.

Mademoiselle turned her big, sad eyes upon him.

"C'est une petite poème exquise," she said, but without any enthusiasm, "mais-très facile. Essayez donc!"

She read the first verse again, very slowly and distinctly:

"Elle était pâle, et pourtant rose,
Petite avec de grand cheveux.
Elle disait souvent: je n'ose,
Et ne disait jamais: je veux."

Vowel for vowel, syllable for syllable, Paul repeated it after her exactly as she had said it.

"But you can prrrronounce if you like!" she cried; and there seemed a dozen r's in the word: stirred out of her usual calm, and for once neglecting to speak to him in French, she continued: "Why, then, do you speak so horeebly to me?"

"Poetry's different," said Paul calmly; "it must go like that. Will you say the second verse?"

She closed the book with a little snap, keeping her finger in the place.

“Demandez en français, s’il vous plait, mon petit Paul.”

Paul looked hungrily at the shut book, then at her, to see whether there was any chance of getting what he wanted without doing what he was asked. But the eyes of mademoiselle were inscrutable ; her pale cheeks were perhaps a little flushed, but she was otherwise quite unmoved by Paul’s eager gaze. Of course he gave in. The prospect of being able to stump up and down the long laurel walk reciting French poetry to an admiring audience of dogs was too alluring. He further discovered, too, that there were books in the French language other than grammars, that mademoiselle had several such with her, some with pictures, and that she was of what he called “a lendful disposition.”

“She’s not friendly,” he said ; “she’s queer and quiet, and dreadfully pertikler, but I like her rather : she’s not dull.”

We did n’t like her, but we respected her, for she most faithfully did what she had come

to do. One thing in her favour was that she was always willing enough to walk with us in the fields or in the copse, where she would sit and read absorbedly while we played about, instead of herding us through the village to the highroad, which was Miss Goodlake's favourite promenade.

About this time a strange man came to lodge in the village. This was an event. Even father, least inquisitive of mankind, expressed curiosity as to who he could be, and what he could have come for. His landlady, who kept the postoffice, told nurse that he *said* his name was "Jone."

"I suppose as 'e do mean Jones," she added, "though 'e don't look like the howner of so Christying a surname." She further revealed that he had come to our village "to be quiet"; that he wrote a lot — not letters, but on sheets as big as copy-books; and that "'e did seem to tear un up again as soon as 'a was wrote."

The very first time Fiammetta saw him in the distance she christened him "the Anarchist," and we took her word for it, for she had

once seen a real anarchist in Rome. He certainly *did* look rather what father called a "suspicious character." Thick black hair hung over his extremely narrow collar, and unless the day happened to be really very hot, he always wore a long black cloak, the same shape as mother's golf-cape, and a wide-brimmed felt hat drawn well over his eyes — eyes large, and black, and mournful. His short, straggly beard was black — in fact, the only white things about him were his hands and his face. Before Fiammetta had suggested his being an anarchist, Paul had decided that he was "a wicked uncle haunted by remorse." Paul thought that remorse was a sort of ghost that appeared to people who had done wicked deeds, and frightened them for their sins.

On two or three occasions we pointed him out in the distance to mademoiselle, but she did not seem in the least interested. He often came on father's land that skirted the river, and would sit and sun himself upon the bank, wrapped in his black cloak, and reading pamphletty-looking books. He was very quiet and

did no earthly harm, and father never objected to strangers so long as they kept out of the house grounds, and did not interfere with any of the animals.

Paul had a perfect passion for going off by himself—to seek adventures, he said. Certainly, according to his own account, the most extraordinary things happened upon these expeditions, when nobody but Tonks, his familiar spirit, and a dog or two accompanied him. One morning, when father had taken Harry to a cricket match, and Fiammetta and I had driven into Garchester with mademoiselle to do some shopping for mother, Paul escaped from the vigilant eye of nurse, who was sitting under a tree with Lucy, and wandered off into the copse by himself.

Nurse had carefully covered his clean sailor suit with a blue smock; she called it a “garden-pinny”—a name that Paul resented extremely, and before starting upon his quest he would fain have divested himself of the offending garment, that rustled starchily with his every movement; but it buttoned down the back, fastened, not by good honest button-

holes, easy to undo, even by the wearer, but by nasty underhand loops that no human creature can undo without seeing them; so Paul perforce set forth blue-smocked, and with an ancient cotton hat upon his head. Thor, the deer-hound Sir William had given him, was sunning himself upon the front-door step, but he rose at Paul's approach, and, swinging his tail like a great pendulum, joined the adventurer, and they strayed down the drive together, Paul with his arm round Thor's neck, their usual mode of progression. As they turned off into the copse they were joined by the two fox-terriers, and so set off all four to see what the good hour held.

Fortune favours the brave, for they had not gone very far before Whisky and Soda began to bristle and growl, and Paul saw the Anarchist, seated under a tree not fifty yards off, with a yellow paper book in his hand. But he was not reading; his head leant back against the bole of the tree, his eyes were shut, and he was apparently fast asleep. Paul caught each little dog by the collar, and whispered to them to be quiet. Thor stood still, swinging

his tail, and awaiting developments. *He* was not going to excite himself over every trifle like those absurd small dogs, who spent their strenuous days growling and yapping at nothing. He was so big that he knew himself to be perfectly well able to take care of the whole party should occasion arise. Till it did he would maintain a masterly but beneficent inactivity.

"Shut up, you little sillies!" whispered Paul. "If you wake him up, I'll smack you both."

Paul loosed the little dogs with a warning shake, and crept forward to see whether there were any infernal machines lying about. Fiammetta had informed us that a nihilistic bomb generally looked exactly like a camera, so he knew what to look for. Of course, he could n't investigate the man's pockets; but there was nothing of the sort to be seen, and "he did n't look nubbly anywhere," so Paul advanced stealthily till he was close beside the Anarchist, and bent down to see what book he was reading, for Paul could no more see a book without trying to find out what it was

about than he could pass a dog without trying to pat it. The book was written in some language he could in no wise fathom, and in peering at it he must have touched its owner, for he awoke with a start, sat forward, saw Paul and the dogs (Whisky and Soda immediately began to bark when he moved), and exclaimed apologetically:

"Pardon mees, zat I sleep in your so beautiful wood."

"Oh, it does n't matter in the least," Paul replied affably. "Besides," he added truthfully, "it isn't my wood—it's father's. And please I'm not "miss"—I'm a "he." I suppose it's this beastly old smock muddled you."

The Anarchist stared at Paul, and Paul stared at the Anarchist. Whisky and Soda rolled joyously over on their backs, for they decided that the stranger was harmless, and that they might presently secure a piece of his cloak to lie upon, when they would generously leave him their usual legacy of white hairs. They were always moulting, those fox-terriers, and yet their coats looked beauti-

ful. Thor lay down at full length on the ground ivy, and awaited further developments with his usual calm.

The Anarchist took off his black wide-awake hat, and laid it on the ground beside him, whereupon Whisky promptly rolled over on to it and lay quite still. The Anarchist looked much nicer without his hat, for his forehead was broad and white, and his eyes were not so sombre without its shade.

Paul sat down by Thor, remarking genially: "Shall we talk together a bit now you've woke up?"

The Anarchist seemed delighted at the suggestion, for he made Paul a most beautiful bow, but he seemed somewhat at a loss how to open a conversation. So Paul helped him out by asking:

"Is that an instasting book you were reading?"

"To me, yes," he said, smiling back at Paul.

"I peeped at it," Paul continued confidentially, "but I could n't read any of it all. It is n't in English, is it?"

"No, little sare. It is written in Russian."

“Ah!” Paul exclaimed, wagging his head knowingly — “all about plots and things, I suppose. I wish you’d read a bit to me — in English, I mean.”

“Plots?” repeated the Anarchist in a wondering tone. “Vy should it be about plots?”

Paul edged a little nearer to him, saying confidentially: “I’m not a nasty boy, I really am n’t. If you will tell me anything really exciting about any plots and things you have on hand, I won’t inform the police — I truly won’t.”

The Anarchist looked more and more puzzled till Paul came to the word “police,” then leant forward and looked sharply at him, saying:

“How say they of me in this village?”

Paul considered a minute. “Not much,” he said, shaking his head. “Mostly that you are very quiet, and eat very little, and write a lot, and that you say your name is Jone, but nobody believes you. I don’t, for one. I do wish you’d tell me your real one. I won’t tell anyone but Tonks.”

The Anarchist ticked off each item of Paul's information on his fingers while Paul was speaking, then he said:

"And I wish that you would tell what *you* think I make 'ere."

"*Bombs*," Paul answered promptly. "And oh, I do wish you would show me one, if you're quite sure that it would n't go off."

The Anarchist turned quite red. "Ah," he cried angrily, "it is that they say! 'Ow wickett! 'Ow ontrue! Hi am *not* nihiliste. Zey 'ave no sense, zese people. Zey are *stupide . . . peegs!*"

He pronounced the last word with so much energy that Soda arose from the piece of cloak she had annexed and began to bark, whereupon Whisky followed suit, and for a few minutes there was quite an uproar, till Paul captured both the little dogs by their collars, put an arm round the neck of each, squeezing them against him, and took up the conversation just where it had left off, saying:

"*They* did n't say you were an anarchist; it was Fiammetta and me thought that."

"Ze leetle girl in blue? Pouff! zat matter

not at all. Zat is a *canard*, a noding, a *stupid* childishness."

"But if you are not an anarchist, what are you, and how do you know Fiammetta?" Paul demanded.

Mr. Jone looked at the group before him, and laughed. There sat Paul, large-eyed and curious, with an eager fox-terrier head appearing under each arm. Only Thor remained unmoved, stretching his tawny length in Sphinx-like silence. He might have been the statue of a dog but for an occasional swish of his great tail.

"I vill trai to explain, but it is harrrd. You are so yong, but of an inteleegence. . . . Listen, *mon ami*. Hi am vat you call an apostle."

"Are you?" Paul interrupted with respectful astonishment. "How very old you must be!"

"An apostle of freedom, of jostice, of ze brozerhood of man," Mr. Jone continued, with growing excitement, and quite regardless of Paul's interruption. "Now do you onderstand, *mon ami*?"

"The only apostles I ever heard of are the twelve," Paul said slowly. "You are a *new* kind, I suppose?"

"Hi am new, Hi am old, Hi am eternal," Mr. Jone said solemnly. "So long as there is miserie, onjostice, povertie, Hi am there, Hi protest, Hi make myself 'eard. Zey *shall* hear me, though they listen not; zo zey try to mozzle me, zey shall not."

He had quite forgotten Paul, and his voice rose at the end of his sentence to a regular shout. Whisky and Soda again protested against his violence in a series of short, sharp barks, accompanied by violent struggles to free their heads from Paul's restraining arms. When they had quieted down he said breathlessly:

"*Anyone* could hear that, unless they were stone deaf; if you don't mind, I wish you would n't speak quite so loud: it upsets the dogs so."

"I will be tranquil," Mr. Jone answered repentantly, "but my 'eart 'e burn ven I speak of zese sings, even to you. Some day you, too, because you 'ave what you call ze temper-

ament, you, too, vill 'ear that cry, then you, too, will care."

Mr. Jone's voice had dropped almost to a whisper. He seemed to have forgotten Paul altogether. His head was sunk forward, he had clasped his long white hands over the book he held; there was no sound in the wood except the panting of the fox-terriers, who found Paul's clasping arms very hot and uncomfortable.

Paul heaved a deep sigh, saying sadly: "Then I s'pose you haven't a bomb of any sort that you could show me?"

Mr. Jone started a little at Paul's voice, as though he brought himself back to the present with difficulty, and shook his head.

"No, my little friend, not one. Hi 'ave never seen one myself. Not all who love freedom love what you call 'bomb.' Here in this so pleasant contry you all sleep——"

"I don't," Paul interrupted, "'cept at night."

"Your peasant," Mr. Jone went on, as if he had not heard, "'e eat, 'e sleep, 'e theenk nevere. Always content, 'e do not wish any-thing different than to work that your so

respectable papa sleep in his chair and live on-troubled days. It is good, it is virtuous, but it is not laife, my little friend — it is not laife.”

Paul did not understand Mr. Jone’s point of view, but it is possible that there flashed into his mind a picture of father as he had seen him two or three days ago, standing up in a cart of straw “pitching” it to the men building the stack — father always chose the hardest place on these occasions, that the men might see he never asked them to do anything that he could not do himself — and feeling that there was in Mr. Jone’s last remark something depreciatory of father, he resented it accordingly, and so far forgot his manners as to say somewhat tartly:

“My father’s a much busier person van *you*, anyhow; I’ve never seen *him* go to sleep in the morning in my life.”

“So, so,” laughed Mr. Jone quite good-naturedly; “if I am idle, *mon ami*, it is because these so busy, interfering ones have took away my vork from me, and yet I find nossing else. I vait, I vait patientlee.”

Paul unclasped his arms, and Whisky and

Soda dashed delightedly away in the aimless, fussy fashion peculiar to fox-terriers. He scrambled up from the ground himself, and Thor rose, too, with graceful dignity. Paul laid his hand lightly on Thor's collar, as though to receive moral support.

"You've never explained what you really are," he said in an injured tone.

"You will not understand," said Mr. Jone a trifle wearily, "but if zey ask you, zose stupide vons, tell them I do lecture on Sociology."

"I thought it sounded rather like the lecture people," Paul remarked thoughtfully. "It is very disappointing, but it's not your fault, I s'pose. P'raps you'll be more instasting next time," he added encouragingly; "we're sure to meet again."

"*A la bonne heure,*" cried the stranger gaily. "But see vat 'airs your leetle vite dog 'ave put on my at: eet is vite."

Paul apologised for the hairs on the hat, but omitted to point out that the portion of the cloak recently in the occupation of Soda was similarly and equally copiously adorned. He bade a courteous farewell to Mr. Jone, and

strolled slowly home to lunch, wearing the chastened expression of one who, going forth to seek infernal machines, had found sermons instead.

"I saw your Anarchist this morning in the village," father said that evening when we were all crowded round him to hear about the cricket match; "he has n't at all a bad face. I suppose he's one of those writing gentry, but I must say it seems a pity to me that an able-bodied young chap like that should hang about all day, apparently doing nothing; I'd half a mind to ask him if he'd like to help in the harvest by and by."

"*He's* not an anarchist," Paul said scornfully: "he's a soshol something — he said so — and he's the preachiest person I've seen for a long time; he sort of lectures all the while. He's not a bit instasting really, and he calls the people in the village 'pigs,' which is very rude."

"By Jove!" said father. And that was all he said.

CHAPTER XIX

FATHER SOLVES THE MYSTERY

And, because right is right, to follow right —
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

LORD TENNYSON.

THAT very evening after dinner father went out across the rabbit warren into some of the best covert, for it was getting on towards autumn, and poachers were not unknown in our neighbourhood. Lately more than one wire had been found in the hedges.

It was a “shiny night” and a Saturday, and father — who had a sneaking sympathy for all poachers, particularly if they happened to be lads — always preferred, if possible, to catch the coveter of his neighbour’s game himself rather than let him fall into the hands of Ravenhill, the keeper, who was of a vengeful and litigious disposition. Ravenhill certainly did not agree with Charles Kingsley’s theory that a keeper “is only a poacher turned outside in”; he looked upon all poachers as vermin, to be “treated as sech.”

It was a very still moonlight night, and father sat down on a felled tree behind some big gorse-bushes to wait; the gorse-bushes grow in great clumps right alongside of the copse where Paul had met the Anarchist that morning. Father had n't been there long when he heard footsteps approaching from different directions, so he kept very quiet till the steps met and stopped quite close to him. He peered round the side of the bush, and not ten yards from him stood mademoiselle and the Anarchist talking very fast in whispers in some language he did not understand.

It was rather a shock to father, for he liked mademoiselle, and he respected her for the way she insisted on drumming some French into us, no matter how idle we were. She never would go down to dinner in the evening, although mother often asked her, but she always said that she much preferred to have her supper sent in on a tray to the school-room, and afterwards she usually went out to walk in the garden. Only this very evening mother had asked her to come downstairs, but she had excused herself on the score of impor-

tant letters to write to catch some mail or other. And here she was out in the wood at ten o'clock at night!

Now, if father had been like people in a book, he would have stopped there for ever so long and listened (that he did not understand what they were saying, even if he could have heard, would not have mattered); he would have awaited developments, allowed them both to go away without seeing him, and endless and doubtless interesting complications would have arisen.

But the rôle of eavesdropper was one that in no way appealed to father. He had come out after poachers, not governesses. Having, however, unexpectedly caught his children's governess in a decidedly equivocal situation, it seemed to him that the simple and straightforward course was to ask her for an explanation there and then; so he arose from his seat upon the felled tree, and, without the smallest attempt to move quietly, climbed over the wooden fence separating copse from field, and, looking very big and black in the shadow, walked leisurely down upon made-

moiselle and Mr. Jone. Mademoiselle gave a little cry, and caught her companion by the arm, and so standing together, they faced father in dead silence.

Father was nonplussed, for he had expected a voluble explanation at the very first moment of his appearance upon the scene; but none seemed forthcoming, so he lifted his cap politely, saying pleasantly:

"I hope you've got on thick shoes, mademoiselle; the dew is heavy just now. Won't you introduce me to this gentleman?"

Mr. Jone lifted his black slouch hat with a sweep, and mademoiselle, still clinging to his arm, said rapidly:

"It is not what you think, it is against the *convenances* that I am here so late, but it is not what you think."

"I'm not at all sure what I *do* think," said father slowly, "except that surely it would be better, and more comfortable for everybody concerned, if this gentleman — since he appears to be a friend of yours — were to call upon you at the house. It is not usual, it is not wise ——"

Father stopped, because mademoiselle suddenly drew her arm out of Mr. Jone's, and, clasping her hands, took a step towards him, saying passionately :

"How could he? What right has a governess, here only for a few weeks, to receive visitors in your house? You know, monsieur, that madame would never permit for one minute. You are kind, you are not harrrd, but you know it could not be."

Father was puzzled. She looked so small and white and helpless, yet quite unshamed. Mr. Jone stood by in absolute silence. He seemed endowed with quite remarkable powers of detachment, for his attitude was entirely that of spectator. He seemed to wash his hands of the whole affair, and stood aside to let mademoiselle and father settle it between them.

This rather annoyed father, and he turned upon Mr. Jone, saying angrily :

"Have *you* nothing to say, sir? Why do you let her do it? She is only a girl, and you ought to know better than ask her to meet you in this hole-and-corner fashion."

"He did not ask me to meet him," mademoiselle exclaimed eagerly, while Mr. Jone shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands with the air of one who finds explanation tedious, if not impossible. "It is I who beg him to come here; it is my onlee chance to see him: he is all I have in the worrrld. He is a year more yong than me."

"But," said father, with a growing desire to catch Mr. Jone by the scruff of the neck and shake some remark out of him, "if you are so fond of him, why didn't you tell us so, and then he could have come to see you openly and properly. Are you engaged to the man, or what?"

Mademoiselle burst out laughing, and Mr. Jone smilingly shook his head from side to side, saying slowly:

"Zere is no romance, monsieur — she is my sistare. I lose my professorship just as she come 'ere; she tell me to come here also. I come; zere is nowhere else. She teaches not all ze time, then I see 'er."

"Then why, in the name of all that is ridiculous, did you make a mystery about

it?" father cried, with considerable irritation. "Why call yourself by a false name, and play the fool generally? Your sister is a clever and exceedingly industrious young lady. Why in the world should you jeopardise her good name and her position by such silly play-acting as this?"

Father took a step towards the man as if he really would like to shake him.

"Listen, sir," said mademoiselle, stepping in between them. "It may seem childish to you, but it was a necessity for us. If I publish it abroad that my brother is that Professor Vizille who has just lost his lectureship in Bonn through his political opinions, do you think your so respectable high schools, your ladies' colleges, they will let me teach French to their *pensionnaires*, will recommend me to high families for the *vacances*? Yet, if I lose my post, we have nothing, absolutely nothing, with which to live. You know, you know yourself."

"And do you share your brother's political opinions, mademoiselle?" asked father.

"I not only share them, I *inspire* them,"

she answered proudly; "but I do not obtrude them on those I serve."

"That's just as well," father said dryly; "but I fancy you rather overrate your brother's influence and celebrity. I don't believe my slow-witted compatriots would care a hang what his political opinions were, or yours either, so long as you continue to teach French in the admirable fashion you do at present — provided, as you say, that you do not obtrude them upon your charges." And father paused and smiled to himself as he thought of Paul.

For a minute no one spoke, then the Anarchist removed his slouch hat, and came out into a patch of moonlight right in the middle of the path. He looked very earnest, and father noticed then how strong was his resemblance to mademoiselle.

"If you will pardon that she 'ave met me," he said slowly, "I will go away to-morrow. She is 'appie in your 'ouse. You and madame, you are kind for 'er. She like ze children. She love zat leetle Paul, who go always with so much dogs. I will go, vanish: you shall see me no more."

As he spoke, mademoiselle took one of his hands in both her own, and stooped her head and kissed it.

"He is so lonlee," she said simply, "and to me he is always the little brother."

Father cleared his throat loudly. "It's very damp," he said severely, "and it's getting late. You must allow me to take you home, mademoiselle. I'm pleased to have met you, sir, and you had better come and see your sister to-morrow afternoon. I will explain to Mrs. Staniland. Meanwhile, I must think things over a bit. Good-evening, Mr. Er—er;" and father bungled over the name, for he never thought of mademoiselle as anything but mademoiselle. I doubt very much if he remembered that she had a surname at all. He offered his arm to her, and she took it meekly. Then he marched her off, leaving her brother still standing bare-headed in the moonlight.

Neither father nor mademoiselle spoke at all till they came within sight of the side-door. Then he patted the cold little hand that lay so lightly on his arm, saying gently:

"Be straight, my dear young lady; it pays best in this country, I assure you."

"Ah," said mademoiselle enigmatically, "you are such a great big man!"

"Size has nothing to do with it," said father.

They had reached the door, and she slipped her hand from his arm and held it out to him, saying softly:

"There is more than one way to be big, monsieur. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.* But it is not for the many."

.

"Why was mademoiselle out so late?" mother asked when father joined her in the drawing-room a few minutes later. "I heard her say good-night to you outside."

"My dear, that's a long story," father replied, and he proceeded to tell it.

"There's one thing certain," said father when he had exhaustively discussed the situation with mother, "that chap must get something to lecture about over here—I suppose he *can* lecture, and that sort of thing is more in your line than mine. What they think

l'èse majesté at some twopenny little German college would probably sound mere mild Radicalism over here. He must not be allowed to sponge on that poor little hard-working woman for long. What do you suggest ? ”

“ I should say he ’d better go to Edinburgh,” said mother thoughtfully, “ or Aberdeen ; they like advanced opinions up there, and are most interested in Sociology. I should think he would be almost certain to get something to do if he is clever. Is he clever, do you think ? ”

“ He can hold his tongue,” said father grimly, “ and that ’s more than some of ’em can do.”

To the end of the chapter we called him the Anarchist, and I do believe he rather liked the name. We saw a good deal of him during the next fortnight, and he reinstated himself in Paul’s opinion ; for if he knew nothing about bombs, he could tell us fairy-tales in English that was a never-failing source of amusement and delight. He would laugh, too, at his own mistakes in the most whole-hearted and good-

natured fashion. He could, moreover, manufacture the most wonderful things out of paper — boats, birds, beasts, and, best of all, whole suites of what he called “venitchaw” for the doll’s house. I think he thoroughly enjoyed himself in our society, for he was little more than a boy in years, and assuredly a thorough boy at heart. Mademoiselle was very strict with us regarding him; he was never allowed to join us in copse or field unless by mother’s invitation, but by that invitation he came to tea in the schoolroom or in the garden about three times a week, and when mademoiselle was not on duty she was free to spend her time with him; and I like to remember that the post of holiday governess was for once a really happy one.

We never completely lost our awe of her, for she manifested her gratitude to father and mother by redoubled energy of determination that we should know *some* French before she left us. It was a fatiguing process, but by sheer enthusiasm and dogged persistence she achieved the end she had in view, and when Harry went to a preparatory school in the fol-

lowing autumn his French was pronounced by the authorities to be exceptionally good for his age.

We were not, however, allowed to enjoy the society of our Anarchist for long. He actually did go to Edinburgh to see if he could find something to lecture about, and found it, to our great sorrow.

It seemed to us that he might have stayed on indefinitely in the village; his English matched our French so well, and we found it in our hearts to envy the Edinburgh people who were to attend his lectures till we were informed by the authorities that he would lecture in French.

CHAPTER XX

FIAMMETTA'S FIRST CRICKET MATCH

Flaunelled he was upon his leggès thikke and schuldrës brode.

Oxford Magazine.

“**D**O you mean to say that you have never seen a county match in your life?” Harry demanded, much as though Fiammetta, to whom he addressed himself, had already reached an incalculable age.

“I’ve never seen any cricket at all till I came here,” she answered gaily and without a touch of shame. “You see, they don’t play it in winter in London.”

“They don’t play it in winter anywhere,” Harry interrupted.

“And we’re nearly always abroad after May,” Fiammetta continued serenely. “Father does n’t think London good for me in the summer months.”

“What sort of place is abroad?”

"Oh, lovely! All sorts of places. Everywhere except England is abroad ——"

"Do they play cricket there?"

"I've never seen any, but I dare say they do."

"I don't think I should care for it," Harry said decidedly. "From what I can make out, there's nothing but scenery, and cathedrals, and museums, and moonlight, and footling things of that sort."

"I don't know what you mean by 'footling,'" retorted Fiammetta indignantly; "but there's just as much *scenery* here for the matter of that, *and* moonlight."

"But there's cricket, too," interpolated Paul, who was reading the *Field* in a luxurious, old-gentlemanly fashion, seated in the box of the lawn-mower which held him quite comfortably, while the rest of us sat round him on the lawn itself.

"I think," Fiammetta began in rather a dubious tone, "that I should like cricket better if the ball was a little softer. It's such a painful kind of ball."

Paul laid down the *Field* and looked at her

pityingly. "It's your hands that are soft, not the ball that's hard. All cricket balls are like that. Just look at my legs;" and Paul, rolling down his stocking, stuck out a small, thin leg that looked like a map with all the various countries painted in different shades of purple, blue, and green. "That's because I played without pads last night," he remarked proudly.

"More fool you!" quoth Harry. "I always bowl at your legs when you're sidey enough to play without pads; it'll teach you more sense in time."

"Anyway," Paul said, grinning derisively, "you're jolly careful not to stand up to *my* bowling without pads."

Harry seized the lawn-mower box and tilted Paul out of it, but that youth picked himself up quite calmly, sat down again, and both literally and figuratively wrapped himself up in the *Field*. It was quite true — Paul could bowl uncommonly fast balls. No one quite understood how he did it, for he wasn't a bit strong otherwise, but, as father put it, "he'd got the knack."

Fiammetta, her long arms clasped round her knees in her favourite attitude, sat staring at Paul with large, wondering eyes. At last she turned to me, saying:

"It's funny how Paul likes that sort of paper—I think it's so dull; and yet we generally like the same books, he and I. There are no stories in the *Field* and no poetry. What can he find to read about?"

"There's cricket and fishing and all sorts of useful things," said Harry, "but I don't suppose you'd understand. Paul's a queer chap most ways, but he has the sense to care about cricket. He would n't be one of us if he did n't."

"I suppose that's it," said Fiammetta thoughtfully. "It runs in families like noses and things."

It certainly ran in our family, and father used to say that if it had n't been for cricket none of us would have been there; for it was at a cricket match that he first saw mother. It was one of father's few stories, and he was never tired of telling nor we of hearing how at one county match (father played for Gar-

setshire and for "Gentlemen" when he was younger) he was fielding in the slips when a ball went clean over his head right into the middle of the grand-stand, where it was caught and smartly thrown back straight into his hands by a tall, fair girl sitting in the third row. The whole thing happened in a flash, but father said that there and then he made up his mind that "she was the maid for him." During the interval for lunch he worried the whole eleven until he found out who she was. She came from the county they were playing; one of her brothers was in the eleven (we have lots of uncles all cricketers), and that evening father got himself presented to her.

At this point somebody always interrupted with the question, "And when did you ask her to marry you?" "Well, that took a longish time," father used to say slowly. "You see, *she* was n't so sure as I was, and it never pays to rush your fences."

"Did she say 'Yes' when you did ask her?"

Father shook his head and laughed.

“Oh dear, no; maids like that aren't got for the first asking.”

“When did she say ‘Yes’?”

“The night I got my century at Lord's against ‘Players.’ Her people were up in town for the match. Your uncle Arthur was playing, too, and I saw her for five minutes after stumps were drawn — and now you know all about it. . . .”

But we did not, not by a long way, and that was why we never tired of the story. There was always something fresh cropping up, some illuminating fact that threw an entirely new light upon mother. It is odd, but distinctly agreeable, to think of one's mother as “the sweetest maid you'd see from May to September,” and to reflect that the favour of so eminently sensible a lady could ever have depended upon a cricket score. But so it was, and a love of the great game was in our blood.

And now August had come, with it our cricket week, and two of the county eleven were to stay with us.

They arrived the day before the first match

at lunch-time. One we decided at once was of no use for social purposes, however good he might be in the field. When a person opens conversation by remarking, "And how old are you, my dear?" a sensible child dismisses him from further consideration. He was big and red, his boots creaked, whenever he saw us he asked us foolish questions which he mistook for jokes, and next day he made five runs — that's all I remember about him. But the other we decided at once was a man of parts, for he confided to the boys quite early in the afternoon that when he made a poor score he always put his pads on the wrong legs in the second innings to change the luck; and another point in his favour, he appeared to prefer our society to that of the older members of the household.

He, too, was big, but his face was burnt brown — a nice, sunny brown. It was rather an odd face — clean-shaven, square-jawed, strong and battered-looking, as though he had been rather knocked about; but his eyes were large and kind, and his teeth beautiful, so even and white. I have heard him called

an ugly man. So he was till he smiled at you; then you were only conscious how friendly he was, and that his rather battered, prize-fighter expression was an accidental external, which, however, no one who knew him would have altered for the world.

He followed us into the kitchen-garden after lunch (there were so many people at lunch that day that we had to have it in the schoolroom), and we found him plums and apricots on the south wall, and he agreed with us that they tasted ever so much better eaten like that off the trees than sedately on a plate in the dining-room.

"Besides," he added cheerfully, "when you can chuck the stones away no one knows how many you 've had."

After a bit we all squeezed into the arbour, and as there was really very little room for such a party, Fiammetta elected to sit on his knee.

"I can't see," she began, "why people should always think they can ask us *our* ages, and yet if we ask theirs they say we're rude. Don't you think it's very unfair?"

"Mid-on" (we called him that because it was his place in the field, and sounded more friendly than "Mr.") considered a minute.

"No, it's not fair at all," he agreed; "but I'll tell you what: you shall guess my age."

"What are you?" Paul asked, as if his age depended on his profession. "I mean, what do you do besides cricket?"

"I'm a schoolmaster," he said, rather humbly, I thought, as though he were afraid we might not like him so much.

No one spoke for quite a long time, and we all stared at him, considering his age. Harry spoke first.

"Then" — he spoke as if the last announcement altered everything — "I suppose you must be about forty."

Mid-on got quite red. "Indeed I'm not," he cried indignantly. "I'm only twelve years older than you."

"I don't think," Paul began, and his voice was cold and severe, "that *anyone* ought to set sums out of school."

"Good gracious, no!" Mid-on exclaimed in astonishment. "Who on earth would?"

"*You* did," Paul answered, more in sorrow than in anger. "How can we ever find out your age if we have to go adding it on to someone's else's? I can never add things, even with a pencil."

"Oh, I did n't mean it that way; I'm not good at sums myself at all. . . ."

"How do you teach, then?" I asked eagerly.

"I don't teach sums: I teach Latin and Greek and things like that — but don't let's talk about it."

"Are you only twenty-four?" Harry asked in astonishment; "and father told me you were a double Blue at Oxford, and you can play for your county *and* be a schoolmaster."

Mid-on blushed.

"Do I look so very old?" he asked.

"You look a dear," cried Fiammetta, taking his head into her two hands and imprinting a resounding kiss upon his forehead. "I should n't like you to be a bit different."

Mid-on blushed more than ever, but he seemed rather pleased all the same, and he spent the entire afternoon in making dia-

grams of the field for Fiammetta, so that by tea-time that young lady knew the names and respective positions of the entire Garsetshire team. After tea our dear Mid-on was reft from us and carried off to play tennis, and we saw him no more till next day, when, to our great joy, we found that he had elected to drive with mother and us children in the big waggonette rather than with father and the other man in the dog-cart. How we thrilled with pride when his long, shabby bag was lifted in! How many promises we exacted that he would come and talk to us when his innings was over, and how aghast he looked when Fiammetta informed him that she had lain awake half the night praying that he might make "a thousand runs!"

Garsetshire won the toss and went in; they made a most tremendous lot of runs, and we never saw our dear Mid-on all day, for he went in fourth man, and when stumps were drawn he was not out and had made sixty-five. We felt a personal ownership in the applause that greeted his return.

Fiammetta said very little during the drive

home. Perhaps she did not get much chance, for mother and our guest discussed the game exhaustively. As he lifted us down at our front-door, father and the other man came out to meet us, and the other man, as usual, felt it to be his duty to be genial and jocular.

"Well, young ladies," he shouted, "did you discover ——"

When Fiammetta, who must have been very tired and cross, cut him short before he could get any further by saying:

"Now, you know all our ages already, and five black beans *do* make five, and the colour of Solomon's gray mare *was* gray. And you get exactly eleven herrings for elevenpence. So *please* don't ask any of those questions again!"

The other man turned redder than usual, and Mid-on chuckled, but father said gently:

"Little blue maid, little blue maid, why so snappy? Cricket does n't seem to agree with you."

Mother had gone straight into the house, or I don't know what might have happened. Fiammetta seized father's hand, laid her cheek

against it for one moment, and then simply collapsed on the steps in a little heap and began to cry.

"Oh, I am so tired!" she sobbed. "I've watched and watched every single ball they bowled him, and I always thought he would go out or get caught or something. Oh, it was agony!"

Mid-on sat down on the steps beside her and drew her hands away from her face, exclaiming in dismayed tones:

"But you mustn't watch cricket like that. It's the game you must care for — how everybody plays, not what happens to one person."

Fiammetta lifted her head and looked at him through her tears. Her eyes were very bright and just a trifle scornful.

"Oh, that's all nonsense, you dear, stupid man! I could never do that. Cricket is just as dull as every other game that one doesn't make up oneself. It's only the people playing one *can* care about. I'm so glad you're not out, though, for there are three more to come after you, and I don't care a bit about

any of them. So there's still something to look forward to to-morrow."

Mid-on sat staring at Fiammetta; Paul, Harry, and I stood staring at him. Father and the other man had fled. Mid-on's face was a very expressive one, and I seemed to see all sorts of conflicting emotions in it. At last he said shyly:

"It's so funny to have anyone care like that whether I make any runs or not, and it's most awfully nice of you; but, please — I — I know I shall go out first ball to-morrow from sheer nervousness if I feel that you really mind. Won't you promise not to mind?"

Fiammetta held out her slim little hand to him, and it vanished into his big, comfortable grasp.

"I shall mind — a bit," she said, smiling radiantly, though the tears were still wet on her cheeks. "But I won't be sad, because, you see, after all, you'll come and talk to us when you do go out, won't you?"

CHAPTER XXI

PARTING

Parting is such sweet sorrow.

Romeo and Juliet.

IN the beginning of September Mr. Glynn came and stayed with us for a week. It was just after Fiammetta was lost, but that, as Mr. Kipling would say, "is another story," and has already been told elsewhere. Then he went away for a week, and on his return we knew that he had come to take her back with him to London. He could not do without her any more, he said.

"I hate people going away," groaned Harry, the night that Mr. Glynn came back, "when you're used to them, and we've got quite used to Fee now. She was very funny and queer at first, but she's not half a bad kid really."

Harry and I were sitting alone in the arbour after tea. Mr. Glynn was playing bowls with Paul and Fiammetta on the lawn, and we

could hear their voices and the click of the balls from time to time. Close to the arbour was a long border of nicotiana, and the air was heavy with the perfume of the starry white flowers. A sad, sweet scent that, to me, always seems to speak of change, and loss, and dying summer.

"It won't matter so much to you," I said in a melancholy voice. "You're going to school in another week—but think of me. No Fiammetta, and no you. I shall be *horribly* lonely."

"There's the Vicarage girls," Harry said cheerfully; "you can always have them, they are so nice and near."

I did not answer, for I felt a certain shame in that the nearness of the Vicarage girls brought no comfort to my sorrowing soul. Before Fiammetta's arrival they had been my dearest friends, but three short months of her far more exciting society had relegated them to a very different position in my regard, and I felt guilty.

They were good, kind, well-behaved little girls, always decorous in their conduct. When

they came to spend the afternoon one might be certain that all would go pleasantly and peaceably. Well-established, suitable games would be played; they would start their tea with bread-and-butter, and ask if they might wash their hands before that meal, and they would run home at seven, punctually as the clock struck. But they were dull — Paul said they “thought slowly” — and they required endless explanation before they could take part in any game of a “pretending” nature. They also had a habit of saying, “But it couldn’t be so *really*, you know,” which was very trying to those whose imaginative faculties were more highly developed.

As I sat shoulder to shoulder with Harry in the arbour — we were squeezed close together for comfort, and knowing that I was down on my luck he had thrust his arm through mine — I was suddenly conscious that it had been a very jolly summer, and that it was coming to an end. A sense of finality and foreboding seemed to weigh upon me, and I found myself doing what, in childhood, one does so rarely that the phase of feeling stands

out in marked relief in my memory — I found myself looking back and remembering.

In youth one is always looking forward, making plans, longing for the morrow. It is what Harry was doing even then, for he gave my arm another squeeze, saying :

“She ’s sure to come back soon, and you ’re to go and see her in London sometime, you know, and you ’ll have no end of a time. She ’ll be a bit dull, too, I fancy, at first. Let ’s go and play bowls with them instead of moping here. Come on !”

When a boy is feeling a bit miserable, he does something, and generally manages to dull his pain by violent exercise. But when I was miserable all the vigour seemed to leave my strong limbs, and I let Harry go alone to the lawn, while I went slowly and heavily back into the house to seek refuge in my own room.

But when I got there, I found it all in confusion and in the possession of nurse, who was packing Fiammetta’s clothes. The many soft blue frocks, some of them sadly stained and faded, lay in piles upon the bed, and nurse

was wrapping in tissue-paper Fiammetta's splendid copy of the "Arabian Nights," bound in blue velvet, with her name in silver across the front, preparatory to putting it in the bottom of her box.

There was no solace for the wounded spirit here, anyway; and I went out of doors again, to find father walking up and down in front of the house all by himself, smoking his evening pipe.

Then I knew I had found what I wanted. I slipped my hand into his, and joined him in his walk. The big, warm clasp made me feel better somehow, and though we neither of us said anything at all, I am perfectly certain that I comforted father as much as he comforted me. He was very fond of Fiammetta, his "little blue maid."

All of us had presented Fiammetta with parting gifts. Only that afternoon Alice and Ellen from the Vicarage had brought her a beautiful pin-cushion they had made themselves, with her name in pins on the top.

"It took an awful lot of pins," Alice said: "it's so long."

Fiammetta had expressed equal pride and delight in every gift. Her pleasure was absolutely genuine. I never knew a child who had less appreciation of material things in the sense of realising actual value. A penny pencil gave her as much joy as an *édition de luxe* or a Parisian doll — if only it were presented in a spirit of love and approbation.

As father and I walked up and down I presently espied three of the village children edging shyly up the drive. They walked sideways, with many stoppages, and when they saw us they halted altogether, evidently discussing who should make the approach first.

“Father,” I said, “there’s Mary Jane and Rose Mustoe and Tommy Copner. Shall I see what they want?”

But evidently the sight of “Squire” had given them courage (the village children all adored father), for they suddenly approached at a run in a solid phalanx, and Tommy, pulling his forelock respectfully, said in a hoarse whisper :

“Please, sir, could us see that little maid as did set Mary Jane a-foire ?”

"They mean Fiammetta," I whispered.
"What can they want? Shall I tell her?"

"Here she is," said father, as Fiammetta and the others came round the corner of the house towards us. "Little blue maid, these young people want to see you."

Perfectly self-possessed, as always, Fiammetta, flushed with exercise, bright-eyed and blue-gowned, came forward, holding out her hand.

"Have you come to say good-bye to me?" she said kindly. "How nice of you! I go to-morrow, you know, and I'm so sorry."

Rose and Mary Jane pushed Tommy forward, but at the sight of so many spectators his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and, with beads of perspiration bedewing his freckled nose, he stood absolutely silent and abashed, pulling his front lock with one hand, while with the other he held out a small parcel wrapped in pink paper to Fiammetta.

Mary Jane then came to the rescue, and, dropping innumerable curtseys as she spoke (she might have been following the Red

Queen's injunction, "Curtsey while you're thinking; it saves time"), she whispered:

"Dorcas did tell us as you was goin' to-morrow. It's for you, miss, to remember us by, if so be as you 'll accept of it."

Fiammetta hastily undid the parcel. It contained a china effigy of a spaniel dog, such as you see on every cottage mantelpiece in Garsetshire — a sitting dog, solid and comfortable, the brown part very brown, the white very white and shiny.

"Is this for me?" cried Fiammetta. "How very kind of you! I shall keep it always. Thank you so much."

She embraced Rose and Mary Jane as she spoke, and would have bestowed a like favour on Tommy Copner, but that he hastily retreated behind the two little girls.

Rose found her voice again. "We thought as you 'd like it," she said complacently, "and we be all sorry as you be goin', though you do be so curus and mishtiful."

Fiammetta's face fell. "How do you mean?" she asked somewhat tremulously.

On the presentation of the "span'll dog,"

father and Mr. Glynn had withdrawn from the scene, lest peradventure their presence should cause any embarrassment to the deputation; so now Rose Mustoe continued in a somewhat louder whisper:

"We thinks as you did n't know no better, and lest you should ever fret about it, we wanted you to know as us don't bear no malice."

"But why *should* you bear malice?" Fiammetta cried despairingly. "I don't understand."

"'Tis Elijah she be thinkin' of," said Tommy Copner helpfully, "an' them prophets a-dancing when you did burn she."

"Oh, *then*," Fiammetta cried, suddenly enlightened; "that's a long time ago, and I had forgotten all about it!"

"We 'ad n't, though," Mary Jane said dryly, "and that's woi we be come."

In silence we all stared at one another, Fiammetta clasping the china dog to her breast and looking wistfully from one shiny red face to the other.

"Thank you *very* much," she said impres-

sively at last; "it is most kind of you. I shall never forget you, and I shall keep this beautiful dog *always*."

"Good-bye, miss," said Tommy at last, making a move and finding his voice at the same time. "Us shan't forget you neither."

Silently the little girls turned to follow him, and the three children ran down the drive and disappeared. When I looked at Fiammetta there were tears on her cheeks and her eyes were red.

"Was n't it dear of them, Janey?" she said softly; "and I had forgotten all about them."

.

"I want you all to stand on the front steps when I go, just as you stood when I came," said Fiammetta next morning, when we were all assembled in the hall to see them start. The luggage had gone in the luggage-cart, and mother was to drive them to the station in the dog-cart, Fiammetta to sit behind with Greenwood by special request.

It was all over so quickly; but we did n't stand on the steps long, we ran down the drive after the dog-cart, shouting and waving till

they vanished from our sight at the turn of the road.

Paul spoke first. "I'm glad *I'm* not going to London," he said with a sigh. "No dogs, no grass, nothing but roads and houses and shops and streets."

"You've never been there," Harry objected. "How d' you know?"

"*She* told me," Paul said triumphantly, "and *he* told me, and I've read about it. They've got places they call parks, where anybody can go, like the park in Garchester; but there's no *ownness*, like there is here." And Paul, accompanied by all the dogs, struck off out of the drive into a side-path leading to the copse.

Harry and I stood undecided in the middle of the drive. The September sky was very blue, the dear familiar country very fair and gracious.

"She'll come back soon, you bet," Harry said cheerfully. "I heard Mr. Glynn say so. Buck up, Janey! Let's go and feed the rabbits."

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In a very delightful book called the "Open-Air Boy" there are some verses, in which the author seems to me to sum up in a few lines of exquisite aptness and simplicity the feeling of thankfulness that should be ever present in those to whom a healthy youth and "happy play in grassy places" has been vouchsafed. And in his words, so much more beautiful than any I could hope to find, I most fitly close these memories of mine.

"And so farewell, days of my youth, farewell.

For all I've said and done that was amiss,

For all I've hurt, for all I've used not well,

I pray Thee, Lord, to pardon me for this.

"And for my youth, for hearing, health, and sight,

For nights of wonderment and joyous days,

For sea and streams, for downs' and woods' delight,

I give to Thee, Lord of all these, the praise."

THE END
